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ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of a major study of preschool provision in Scotland. Part 1 of the report sets the context for the project, clarifying its aims, providing information on relevant issues, and discussing the research questions addressed. Part 2 presents the findings arising from the various methods used to collect evidence. Finally, part 3 focuses on issues related to the quality of provision that emerged from the findings and locates these issues in the context of the specific research areas for investigation set out in the first part of the report. The research, which concentrated on children ages two to four years, looked at four main areas relating to experiences with and outcomes of preschool provision: (1) costs and benefits; (2) the extent to which developmentally appropriate aims are compatible with education demands of formal schooling; (3) provision made in different centers for special needs children; and (4) perceptions of parents and providers of the quality in preschool provision. Evaluation results indicated that most children attending any kind of center-based care were likely to have access to suitable facilities and a wide range of resources and equipment for promoting their social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development. The findings also suggested that although there seem to be many different forms of care and education available, many parents may have limited choice. In particular, many working parents who are looking for full-time care face problems finding care provision that meets their needs. (Contains over 100 references.) (AA)

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We Are Getting Them Ready For Life

Provision for Pre-Fives in Scotland

Janet Powney
Peter Glissov
Stuart Hall
Wynne Harlen

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Janet Powney
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The Scottish Council for Research in Education

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We are Getting Them Ready for Life

Provision for Pre-fives in Scotland

Executive Summary

"...readiness for school is important but we are getting them ready for life"
Nursery nurse

The Scottish Office Education Department commissioned a two year study into day care and educational provision for children between the ages of two and four, a project carried out (1992-94) by the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) in conjunction with Children in Scotland (previously Scottish Child and Family Alliance) (SCAFA) .

BACKGROUND

Provision for children under five years old is a lively political issue and early education and care have been subject to scrutiny and change in recent years. There are several reasons for this research being particularly opportune: the recent publication of a report by HM Inspectors of schools, *The Education of Children under 5 in Scotland* (1994); the major innovation of the 5-14 Development Programme which could have implications for pre-five provision; the Rumbold report in England which highlighted questions about the quality of provision; the Children Act 1989 and the extension of the identification of children with special needs down from five to two year olds. These provide a background to potential expansion of pre-five services depending on demand as well as the costs and benefits of the different types of provision.

Form of care and education for under fives

There are many different forms of care and education available to children before they go to school, some organised and funded by local authorities and others run as private businesses or by voluntary organisations – often with support from the local authority. The situation is further complicated by partnerships between some of these parties. Local authority provision is usually split into predominantly 'education' (nursery schools and classes) and predominantly 'care' (day nurseries and children's centres) with these two types of provision rooted in different philosophies and rationales. Local authority provision has been insufficient to meet the needs and preferences of some parents who have turned instead to private nurseries, childminders, or playgroups, (voluntary organisations run by parents).

AREAS FOR INVESTIGATION

The project looked at four main areas relating to the experiences of and outcomes for, children, aged from two to four years, attending different types of provision:

- costs and benefits for children, their families and providers in relation to various types of pre-five provision
- the extent to which the aims of meeting the wider needs of children under five are compatible with educational demands of formal schooling (the 5–14 Development Programme)
- the provision made in different centres for children with special needs
- how key people (parents and providers) perceive and evaluate quality in pre-five provision.

FINDINGS

The summary of findings which follows draws on evidence from all the research methods (detailed at the end of this summary).

Different kinds of pre-five provision (including costs and benefits)

Shortage of provision

- While day nurseries and some partnership nurseries provide a low cost service to parents, they are few in number; in some regions there are none at all. (At March 1992 there were 5684 places available in local authority day nurseries compared with 48,127 places in local authority nursery schools by September 1993.)
- Almost all day nurseries and around three quarters of other group providers reported having a waiting list for entry. In contrast, only 6% of childminders said that they had a waiting list. This may suggest some spare capacity within the childminding service.

Costs and access

- The costs of pre-five services to parents – other than snacks and meals – ranged from no charge (for example, in around 90% of nursery schools), to £3.50 or more per hour (in the case of two private nurseries). Seventy one per cent of playgroups charged from 80p to £1.59 per session; 93% of childminders and 81% of private nurseries charged between 80p and £3.19 per hour.
- The majority of providers, except playgroups, provided a service on five days per week. Weekend and evening service was rare, however. Day nurseries and childminders provided the longest daily opening periods and were most likely to provide a year round service (80% of each reported this). Playgroup sessions lasted between one and a half to three hours. Most places in nursery schools were for half a day only.

Concurrent pre-five experiences

- Shortage of full day provision means that working parents may make use of more than one kind of provision. Over half of the centres surveyed (as many as 75% of playgroups and 71% private nurseries) said they had children who attended at least one other provider. These alternative services were most commonly playgroups and childminders who apparently provide complementary services for parents using other groups, even private nurseries. Seventy per cent of childminders reported that they also took one or more children in their care to some other form of provision.

Similarities and differences between providers

- Most children attending any kind of provision were likely to have access to suitable facilities and a wide range of resources and equipment for promoting their social, emotional, physical and intellectual development.
- Evidence from an early childhood environmental rating scale indicated little difference between the kinds of facilities available to provide children with a variety of experiences and activities. The slight differences observed between playgroups and other providers were related to playgroups sharing accommodation with other services and whether or not a trained playleader was present.
- The environmental rating profiles for nursery schools, day nurseries and partnership nurseries were very similar in terms of the use of space, materials and experiences to enhance children's development, their daily schedules and the supervision provided. This finding challenges a traditional distinction often made between day care facilities (such as day nurseries and community nurseries) and education establishments (such as nursery schools and classes). It has been assumed that care has been the main priority for the former and education for the latter.

Benefits and disadvantages for parents

- Thirty nine percent of day nurseries, 37% of private providers and 30% of childminders felt that the advantages of child care were that parents were able to go to work. Nursery schools were more likely than other providers to recognise their short opening hours as a difficulty for parents and a quarter of private nurseries saw their cost to parents as a disadvantage.

- In terms of formal mechanisms for involving parents, such as parent/teacher associations and management committees, private nurseries had notably lower levels of involvement than did other group providers.

Benefits for children

- All providers emphasised the benefits for children in terms of enjoyment and development — especially the opportunities to meet other children and adults:

  "We are not here as preparation for school. We are here because of the benefits that children can gain from pre-school experience. And there are benefits for school, but that's not the only reason that we're here."

  Nursery teacher, nursery school

Learning in pre-school and compatibility with formal schooling

What is learned

- Providers felt that the major benefits to children's learning were in terms of general social and emotional development and communication with their contemporaries and with adults outside their own family as well as the development of skills which would be useful to them later in life — in school and outside.
- Observations of 96 (mostly four year old) children in a variety of group settings showed that two thirds of time (62%) was spent in activities directly related to the primary school curriculum (the 5–14 Development Programme).
- The four most common areas of activity were: paints, crayons, felt tips, etc; preparing and/or eating food; story or poem read aloud; materials for construction. The four most common actions were: observing; describing; drawing, painting, modelling or printing; and asking questions. For as much as a third of the time, children were watching other people and activities in the centre.
- The level of involvement of children varied between types of provision, with the highest levels found in nursery school and playgroup centres and the lowest levels in the private nurseries. It is quite possible that this might relate to the age of the children and length of sessions, as nursery schools and playgroups tend to operate shorter sessions and have older children than in private nurseries.
- Staff said that they tried to create a learning environment which is compatible with, and extends, children's experiences in the home and the community. Pre-five settings buzz with activity and staff claimed their skill was in knowing how to support children's learning, when and when not to intervene.
- Group providers also suggested that pre-five experience would have benefits for children when they went to school since they develop their skills in listening (especially to adults), sitting still, and concentrating while surrounded by many other people and stimuli.

Record keeping

- There was no common approach to keeping, using, and having access to, children's records. This is an important finding given that many children attend more than one service and yet there is no means of tracking their progress between pre-five providers or from their pre-five experiences to primary school.
- Local authority providers were more likely to keep records than other providers. At least 25% of playgroups and 35% of private nurseries and childminders reported that they did not keep records.
- Although nursery schools were more likely than other providers to keep records of children's curricular progress, fewer than half (44%) did so; only one in five day nurseries and private nurseries, 2% of playgroups and none of the childminders kept notes.

Liaison with primary schools

- Some form of liaison with primary schools took place at almost all nursery schools and at around three-quarters of day nurseries but this liaison was predominately one way. Primary staff rarely visited pre-five settings. Fewer than half of private nurseries and playgroups reported any liaison. Liaison about the curriculum was reported by only 17 out of 300 centres.

Meeting the needs of all children

Minority cultures

- For many children from minority cultures there was no one at their child care centre who shared their culture or first language. At least one in five group providers (39% of nursery schools) and one childminder looked after one or more child whose first language was not English. Only 14 group providers (around 5%) — mainly nursery schools and day nurseries — reported that any of their childcare staff were from an ethnic, cultural, or religious minority group.
- Parents and providers generally felt it appropriate and valuable to familiarise children with the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nature of today's society. Relevant curriculum materials, however, were not available in every centre and the researchers did not observe any activities related to multi-cultural or multiracial issues.

Children with special needs

- Day nurseries and nursery schools were more likely than other providers to have children with special needs; physical difficulties; learning difficulties and/or emotional and behavioural problems (Table 1). It should be borne in mind that very young children with difficulties may have priority for a full-time place in day nurseries.
- Although many centres admit children with special needs, few staff were trained to support such children. Fewer than two in 10 centres reported having any staff with specialist training of any kind and therefore the children in most need are being cared for by the least qualified.
- The idea of integration of children with special needs was endorsed by parents, regions and providers. In practice this may vary from complete integration to merely being in the same building.
- Working with children with special needs requires collaboration between various agencies from health, social welfare and education, and parents. Inter-agency collaboration did not always occur in practice.
- A few children with special needs were observed and it is worth noting for future exploration that children with special needs did more activities which included adults and less with children than did other children. Their involvement was also more often described as 'above routine' than was the case for the other children.

Quality in pre-five provision

Ethos

- Parents and providers attached most importance to health and safety; activities which are fun; and adult:child ratios and relationships.
- Staff and parents from all kinds of child care had similar views about the appropriate ethos for pre-five settings. They endorsed: a welcoming and friendly atmosphere in which people feel comfortable; happiness among staff and children; a setting that is cosy and home like; a place where all people are valued.

Quality assurance

- Centres adopted a variety of ways of assessing their own quality, including development planning, monitoring, meetings and inservice opportunities for staff — for example an internal review of staff–child interaction. HMI and regional support for nursery schools seems patchy; some had advice from their regional advisers/inspectors whereas others reported a lack of attention from HMI and/or their region.

Staff training and qualifications

- Under The Children Act (1989) regions are required to review provision; the first of these reviews has enhanced inter-agency collaboration and encouraged regional authorities to establish quality assurance procedures with guidelines to providers on how to implement those procedures.
- Staff with specialist qualifications (that is beyond the minimum professional requirements) were most likely to be found in nursery schools — over a third had at least one such member of staff. Fewer than two centres in 10 reported having any staff with specialist training of any kind.
- Forty five per cent of childminders reported having some form of qualification related to childcare.
- Informants emphasised the importance of the quality of staff a majority of all providers wanted further support and training (79% of day nurseries, 72% of nursery schools, 64% of private nurseries and 51% of playgroups). Discussions with staff in 16 centres indicated diverse needs and priorities for further training and development and these reflected their personal responsibilities. For example, managers were more concerned with team building, curriculum development or administration skills, whereas junior staff aimed for more specific areas, most commonly for training and support in working with children with special needs.
- Childminders, playgroups and private nurseries had fewer opportunities to pursue training compared with staff in local authority centres.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Different types of provision

- The demand for pre-five services is likely to continue and expand. This does not necessarily mean maintaining the same types of provision but rather a variety of provision — part-time and full time, and opportunities for different kinds of experiences.
- Evidence from waiting lists, the survey and the interviews indicated that, overall, provision for pre-fives and hours of opening of centres are not sufficient to meet the current needs of parents. In particular, the needs of working parents need to be addressed to ensure that sufficient services extend beyond the normal school day and year, to cover evenings, weekends and holidays.
- The effects of multiple types of care outside the home for children in their early years need further exploration, especially the crucial role played by childminders.
- Integrated systems of assessment and record keeping are needed in pre-five settings and primary schools so that it is possible to track children who use different services concurrently, and as they proceed into primary school.
- This study only investigated those families who were using pre-five services; more needs to be known about the needs and preferences of parents whose children were not involved in some pre-school provision.

Learning and child-centred activities

- Scotland needs to have evidence of the mid and long term benefits, educational and social, of different types of pre-five settings and of the investment of substantial resources in the total provision for pre-fives.
- The relevance of pre-school activities to the 5–14 Development Programme needs to be clarified to allay the uncertainty of some pre-five staff about links between their work and formal schooling. Adults in pre-five settings place a strong emphasis on children's communication and social skills and these are necessary to learning at any age.
- This study suggests that the needs of children for whom English is not the mother tongue may not be being met.

Staff

- Distinctions between nursery nurses and teachers are often blurred in operational terms. This study found more similarities than differences in the experiences and activities provided for children in the sample of nursery schools, day nurseries and partnership nurseries studied in detail.
- Staff in all pre-five settings (including childminders) wanted further training and staff development. What types of inservice training are needed, for whom and by whom, needs to be clarified.

Special needs

- Integration of children with special needs may be desirable in principle but the concept has many interpretations. Expectations of integration which can be built in pre-five settings with favourable child:adult ratios, may be unrealistic for primary schools with less favourable child:adult ratios. Models of successful and realistic forms of integration are needed.

Collaboration

- The Children Act (1989) emphasises joint responsibility and partnership in designing and maintaining services through consultation with, and between, agencies and with parents. Mutual communication is not always successful and it would be helpful to identify the most successful ways in which parents' needs and preferences can be established.

Maintaining and enhancing quality

- Regional quality assurance procedures could, in the long term, improve the quality of pre-five provision. At the same time it is important to ensure that each centre is receiving adequate support and advice from regional and national advisors and inspectors.
- It is difficult to say, however, how robust new quality assurance procedures will prove to be after the reorganisation of the local authorities.
- Definitions of quality are tempered by the resources available, and the best deployment of those resources. Furthermore, what counts as quality in the 1990s may be regarded as quaint in a few years time. It is therefore essential to continue to monitor the appropriateness of definitions of quality and related policies as well as to evaluate their implementation.

METHOD

Gaining insights and information about these topics was a substantial task. Overall, information was collected from parents, providers and local authorities concerning the following types of provision: childminders, day nurseries, playgroups, nursery schools and nursery classes, partnership and private nurseries. The research design had to incorporate a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to have any chance of capturing information representative of the multi-layered and complex nature of what goes on as a matter of routine in pre-five settings. For example, many of the relevant processes are unobservable, and staff activities may have a haphazard appearance which belies the planning, organisation and rationale for a centre's activities.

The research took place in three regions of Scotland: Borders, Fife and Strathclyde. In the latter, all services for children are under the aegis of education whereas responsibilities in the other two regions are split between education and social services.

Reflecting the broad canvas of the research questions were an array of research approaches. These included survey work: a postal questionnaire to 1000 providers of different types of care and education (including registered childminders) for two, three and four year olds. The study also included more detailed work in 16 individual centres (day nurseries, nursery classes and schools, playgroups, partnership and private nurseries). This latter component of the study entailed a variety of research strategies: interviews with 50 staff and 59 parents (some based on photographs of children — including some with special needs — engaged in pre-school activities); the use of an early childhood

environmental rating scale to assess facilities and activities across the different settings; observation of 28 staff (mostly nursery nurses) followed by reflective interviews; and tracking the activities of 127 children including the use of Ferré Laevers' involvement scale.

THE REPORT

The first section of this report sets out the aims, background and methods of the study. The findings of the research are reported first in relation to each method of collecting evidence and then drawn together in issues concerning quality: the nature, costs and benefits of different provisions; learning; meeting the needs of all children; and further contributions to the debate on quality. The final section of the report suggests some of the implications of the research for policy, practice and future necessary investigation.

Overview

Part One sets the context for the project.

Chapter 1 – The Aims of the Project - clarifies the aims of the research, sets out the specific areas for investigation, and provides information about the research team.

Chapter 2 – Context of Pre-five Provision in Scotland – provides information on relevant issues, information on the current range of provision for children under five in Scotland and profiles of the extent of pre-five provision in the three Regions participating in the study are provided in the study.

Chapter 3 – Methodology – discusses the research questions addressed and describes how the research task was tackled.

Part Two presents the findings arising from the various methods used to collect evidence.

Chapter 4 — What is on Offer for Pre-fives – providers' survey – sets out the results of a survey of various pre-five providers (including childminders).

Chapter 5 – Where Children and Staff Work – uses the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale to describe the facilities available for pre-fives.

Chapter 6 – Considerations of Quality – through interviews with staff and parents.

Chapter 7 – Pre-fives in Action – observations of young children in 16 centres.

Chapter 8 – Providers in Action– observations of practice and discussions with staff.

Chapter 9 – Ensuring Quality for Children with Special Needs – interviews with centre leaders and Regional Officers as well as analyses of Regional reviews.

Part Three of the report draws on issues to do with quality of provision which have emerged from the findings and locates these in the context of the specific research areas for investigation set out in the first part of the report.

Chapter 10 – The Nature, Costs and Benefits of Pre-five Provision.

Chapter 11 – Learning in the Early Years.

Chapter 12 – Meeting the Needs of all Children.

Chapter 13 – Further Contributions to the Debate on Quality.

Chapter 14 – Implications – the report finishes with a discussion of the implications of the issues raised through the investigation.

It is difficult to avoid the political implications of issues raised to do with provision, with the training and deployment of staff, and with inter-agency work. We have tried to tread the delicate path of raising the issues without necessarily taking sides in the debate.

Part One—Introduction

This first part of the report sets the context for the project.

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Chapter 3 – Methodology – discusses the research questions addressed and describes how the research task was tackled.

1 The Aims of the Project

Introduction

This is a report of a study commissioned by the Scottish Office Education Department and carried out by the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) in conjunction with Children in Scotland into day care and educational provision for children between the ages of two and four. The project was based at and administered from SCRE but was managed and conducted by a team which included a researcher from Children in Scotland.

The Scottish Office Education Department had considered that research into provision for under fives in Scotland (which is not mandatory) had been neglected in recent years. In 1992, when the research was commissioned, there were several reasons for research being particularly opportune: the imminent publication of a report by HM inspectors of schools, *The Education of Children under 5 in Scotland* (1994); the major innovation of the 5-14 Development Programme; the Rumbold report in England which highlighted questions about the quality of provision; the extension of the identification of children with special needs down from five to two year olds; as well as general cost benefit questions about the different types of provision available.

The final brief from the SOED required an investigation into the ways in which the various kinds of provision for pre-fives contribute to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of children. The balance in provision for social and educational development was to be considered in the light of the demands of the 5-14 Development Programme. Particular attention was to be paid to 'children in need', defined as those with Special Educational Needs and those with needs arising from social disadvantage. Costs of various provisions were to be investigated and related to their relative benefits to children, families and society. Each of these areas could have led to separate and substantial studies and therefore it was necessary to be very selective in deciding upon specific areas of research to meet all aspects of the SOED research brief. A résumé of our justification is as follows.

The specific areas of investigation

Implications of the 5-14 development programme

Since the 5-14 Development Programme Guidelines build on good practice in schools, the innovation they embody is not so much in proposing new content as in making explicit and public the targets for pupils' learning at different stages. Children's experiences before school will affect their opportunities to achieve the learning expressed in the targets. For example, the work of Osborn and Milbank (1987) and Anderson (1990) provides evidence that pre-school education is beneficial to children's later learning in school – and therefore the guidelines have implications for pre-five provision.

Two contrasting implications follow when the *educational* value of pre-school experience is emphasised. The first is whether or not pre-school provision ought to be reviewed and perhaps adjusted so that it will make optimum contribution to the

development of skills and ideas which will be required in school. The second is a concern that such adjustment may lead to less attention to the children's other needs which are arguably to the fore with very young children: support in accommodating to separation from family, in feeling at ease in a new social context and in coming to terms positively with new demands and experiences (HMI, 1989). This concern reflects the importance in the aims of pre-school provision of meeting social, emotional and physical needs as well as promoting intellectual development .

A major focus of the research was, therefore, designed to be an exploration of the balance between educational and social development and of the coherence between learning prerequisites of the 5-14 Development Programme and learning in various pre-school settings. This would require matching the content and process demands of the early levels of the 5-14 Development Programme with expectations about children's activities in pre-five settings. The extent to which provision for the under fives takes account of age, educational and social need, and of individual variations in development is pertinent to this focus.

Quality of provision

Our starting points for investigating quality of provision were the ways in which providers endeavoured to meet the standards expected and agreed among themselves, the parents and others with interest in the services. Various publications provided a context. In the area of child care, the European Commission Childcare Network has produced a discussion paper (Balageur, Mestres and Penn, 1991) listing ten criteria of 'high quality services for young children' and proposing a set of indicators for each which enable them to be measured. Based on a rather different definition of quality, McCail (1991) has published a *Pre-five Environment Quality Rating Scale.* The Scottish Pre-school Playgroups Association (SPPA 1990) and the National Children's Bureau (NCB, 1991) provide guides to good practice in various settings. Ward and Jackson (1991) developed a qualitative measure of the outcomes of childcare based on the 1989 Children Act's notion of care as that which 'it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give'.

Expectations of provision and the standards by which they are judged have changed over recent years. For example, emphasis in day nurseries has changed from providing compensation for home circumstances (a deficit model) to involving and helping parents to improve what the home provides (a partnership model). The partnership between parents and teachers and nursery staff is a major thrust of the Children Act 1989. Its importance is also emphasised by the Rumbold Committee of Inquiry (DES 1991) which endorsed the view expressed by the House of Commons Committee report that parental involvement is essential to the success of early education (House of Commons Education, Science and Arts Committee, 1988).

Our concern in this area of the research was therefore with quality in terms of parents' satisfaction, with providers' approaches to evaluating quality and to the overall quality assurance procedures currently deployed or planned by local authorities.

Children with special needs

This area of attention was 'children in need', taken to mean those with identified SEN (including those who are particularly able in certain respects) and those whose needs arise from social disadvantage. Provision for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) differs from other pre-five provisions in Scotland in that it is the statutory duty of

educational authorities to: 'carry out an assessment of all children from the age of two years who have come to their attention as having, or appearing to have, special educational needs' (Scottish Office, 1991).

An important focus, therefore, was the extent to which these duties are recognised by all concerned and effectively put into practice in the experienced curriculum (Robson, 1989).

The provision for children with special needs encompasses institutions outside the mainstream, including the voluntary sector, self-help groups and childminders. The support given to parents and families of children with special needs by professionals in, or associated with, various provisions is a significant part of their function, which needed to be included in the study. This would inevitably bear upon the extent and adequacy of the training of staff. Both staff training and the physical accommodation for children with SEN may be more problematic in mainstream than in specialist provisions.

Benefits and costs of different types of provision

Figures quoted by the Rumbold Committee of Inquiry indicate vast differences in the cost of various types of provision, from £1,505 per annum per child (in 1986-7) in nursery education to £90 per annum per child in playgroups (1989 figure). These differences reflect, of course, the use in playgroups of parents and voluntary staff and raise awkward questions about the 'real' costs of various provisions. Thus analysis even at the simplest level, of determining input in terms of *costs* is problematic. Measures of output, in terms of *effectiveness* are even more difficult. Extrapolating from research in schools (eg Rutter et al, 1983; Mortimore et al, 1988; Riddell and Brown, 1991), suggests that it is necessary to take into account the differences between children entering pre-five provision as well as differences on entering school. The impact of the home and of parental involvement in the care or education setting is an additional complicating factor.

In terms of day care provided for children in their early years outside their family, some children spend most of their time with childminders. Others attend mother and toddler groups, pre-school playgroups, day nurseries, nursery schools or classes. There are also private nurseries and crèche and nurseries which are partnerships between employers and local authorities. Between the ages of two and five a child might attend several of the same kind of provision or a combination of, for example, a playgroup and a childminder. Such combinations make it particularly difficult to sort out the costs and benefits of any one kind of provision for an individual child or groups of children.

This study was able only to concentrate on short-term advantages and disadvantages in different kinds of provision as perceived by parents and others involved. Rough comparisons of costs and benefits in these terms, although possible, need very guarded interpretation but should illuminate some effects of pre-five provision on both the children concerned and their families. Further analysis, in terms of longer-term benefits would require information about longitudinal effects on children and their families of different pre-school experience.

■ Aims of the project

The overall thrust of the research was directed towards investigating ways in which certain kinds of provision for pre-fives contribute to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of children, including those with special needs. Discussion of the specific areas above led to the formulation of the aims of the project as:

- to study the extent to which the educational demands of the 5-14 Development Programme are compatible with the aims of meeting the wider needs of pre-five children
- to investigate providers' and parents' perceptions and evaluations of quality in relation to pre-five provision
- to study the provision made in different centres for families and children with special needs, including both identified educational and social needs
- to address the issues of costs and benefits to children, their families and providers in relation to various types of pre-five provision.

How these were developed into more detailed research questions is described in the next chapter.

The researchers

The team working on this project comprised a researcher from Children in Scotland and three from the Scottish Council for Research in Education where the project was based. Children in Scotland have published several surveys and documents relating to pre-five provision and its Early Years forum has representatives from the major providers of child care and pre-school provision in Scotland. All the SCRE project staff also had experience of working with young children and their parents and an ongoing major related project was the evaluation of the 5-14 Development Programme co-ordinated from SCRE. The project directors were Wynne Harlen and Janet Powney and the other researchers were Stuart Hall (SCRE) and Peter Glissov (Children in Scotland). Heather Malcolm (SCRE) provided helpful advice and Joan Ballantine and Jennie Jackson provided administrative and secretarial support. Helen Brownlie contributed to the formulation of the final report.

2 Context of Pre-fives Provision in Scotland

Introduction

In Scotland there are just over 326,100 children between the ages of 0-4 years, of which just under a third are 3 and 4 year olds (mid-year 1992 estimates, SOED 1994). This population is not evenly distributed between, or within, the Regions, a factor affecting the nature and quantity of daycare available to families with 2, 3 and 4 year old children in different parts of Scotland.

In this chapter we elaborate further on this context of pre-five provision but initially consider what is involved when children make the first, and one of the most important, transitions in their lives, moving from the sheltered private world of their family (whatever shape it takes) to the public world of formal compulsory schooling. We consider separate but overlapping areas dealing with some of the essential characteristics of this process where the importance of age and stages of development should not be underestimated.

The chapter goes on to give a broad description of the services provided in this country to facilitate the transition from infant to child. Traditionally these fall into the following categories: childcare services, education services, and play oriented and other services (although we argue at various stages in the report that such distinctions are often tenuous and redundant). Specific descriptions of the types of services central to this project are also provided in Chapter 3 'Methodology'. There is considerable expenditure (or investment) in Scotland as a whole but Regional differences are considerable and this will be illustrated with reference to the situation in the three Scottish Regions which participated in the Project. The chapter finishes with a brief discussion about staffing and an overview of some of the approaches to quality developed in the pre-five sector.

Under five and moving away from home

A central aspect of early childhood development is the transition from home to school. Children normally spend the first stages of life cloistered in the informal environment of their own home. During the first year or two, learning progresses at a speed unlikely to be matched or exceeded at any point later in life. Besides physical development towards mastery of gross and fine movements, the foundations of communication and speech are laid down. In a nurturing environment, children become more and more social beings. Gradually, they encounter a series of new situations involving people from outside the protection of the immediate family and eventually have to operate alone and (relatively) independently of the family. When they go to school, the full force of the wider community and society are embodied in formal education. In this progression, pre-school services can play an encouraging and supportive role.

One of the central features of early education and care is a child-centred approach (Watt 1990), which has also been a feature of some approaches to primary education, especially the first years. To define what is child-centred is not an easy task but in Watt's words it is 'the notion of basing an educational process on the needs and stage of individual children rather than trying to fit the child to a predetermined programme' (ibid p17).

The recent HMI report on education of children under five, in line with Watt (1990) and Strathclyde Regional Council (1994), stresses the important role of partnership between the family and professionals in educating a child recognising that 'many of a child's most important experiences can come only from the home and those early experiences have to be integrated into the curriculum in any pre-five unit which a child attends' (HMI 1994).

This sentiment acknowledges the holistic nature of young children's learning.

Pre-five services often offer the first opportunity for children to make significant relationships outside the family circle. Children are initiated into society's values through their parents (or primary carers) but in the pre-five setting they are exposed to new experiences and values. For example they may for the first time become part of a group of contemporaries in an environment where there are few, if any, personal belongings and virtually no private space. Moreover the adults are powerful and exercise control which up to that point has only been the prerogative of adults in the family. The rules and underlying values may be encouraged by different sanctions from those used at home. These innovations for a young child may involve new experiences of stress. Parents and early years practitioners become only too aware of this fact when they have to settle a new intake of young children.

The other children and adults that a child meets in pre-five provision are instrumental in progressing the social development of the children in their early years, with the pre-school setting forming an intermediate level of formal introduction to the societal values that a child will continue to experience at school. To make the transition successfully the situation needs to be handled sensitively, with an understanding and willingness to take into account the circumstances and experiences of the child at home as well as in the pre-five setting. These concerns are recognised in the 1992 document from the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum *Reflections on Curriculum Issues: Early Education.* Relevant to children up to the age of 8, it emphasises social and personal development and an holistic approach to working with young children. Stressing the child as learner, it synthesises a number of philosophical and educational principles:

- the importance of all round development
- freedom of choice for pupils (children) to select activities
- a stress on the process of learning and its intrinsic satisfaction
- knowledge is presented free of subject categories so that children's learning activities range across areas of knowledge.

By the time children are five and have had opportunities to develop their learning and (relative) independence, they have moved a long way from the cocooning aspects of home.

A broader context and relevant demographic changes

Looking at the broader policy aspects of the provision the picture is one of change. Recent years have seen considerable demographic changes. Pugh (1993) quotes some of the main features from Social Trends 1993 relevant to young children including:

- a drop in the birthrate to an average of 1.8 children per family – less than the replacement rate
- increasing numbers of births outside marriage (3 in 10 in 1991)
- a considerable increase in the divorce rate (4 in 10 marriages in 1991) and in the rate of remarriage (now a third of all marriages)

- a dramatic increase in the number of lone parents (now 1 in 5 of all families; looking after 2.2 million dependent children). Single parents (almost entirely women) may be bringing up children on their own through choice, widowhood or divorce.
- changes in the division of labour between men and women, with an increasing number of unemployed men. 65% of women with dependent children were working in 1993. Between 1983 and 1993, there was an increase from 24% to 47% in the proportion of working women with dependent children under the age of five.

Such changes create a new environment for pre-five provision and different demands on services. They also require a review of the appropriateness of the traditional separation of education and care.

Between the two world wars, two parallel government services in health and education were established for children before they started formal school at the age of five. (Pugh 1993) indicates how this separation became well established, with different philosophies and expectations of how mothers would spend their time. She neatly summarises the negative attitudes towards working mothers exemplified by the Plowden Report: Some mothers who are not obliged to work may work full-time, regardless of their children's welfare. It is no business of the educational service to encourage these mothers to do so. p.127 Plowden report (DES 1967)

Care for the under threes was primarily concerned with health, and education was for three and four year olds. The result of this separation is that day care facilities, organised initially by the health departments and subsequently by social work departments, take into account the whole family when dealing with a child under three. Nursery education focuses on the development of individual children within a system which leads directly on to formal schooling. These underlying attitudes have persisted in many ways and have implications for staffing the two sectors – more of that later.

Most local authorities still provide day care facilities either in the form of nursery schools/classes under the education department, or through the social work department in the form of day nurseries and children's centres. As the provision made by local authorities was insufficient to meet the needs or tastes of parents, a range of voluntary and private provisions gradually expanded to complement existing provision. Voluntary provision included playgroups (which are run by parents) while private provision included private nurseries and childminders. Although this may appear a fairly straightforward picture, those with experience of the pre-five sector will be aware of its complexities. Various partnership schemes have been established - for example, partnerships between parents and teachers; between local authorities and the voluntary sector; and between regional local authorities and the local authority districts within them. Pugh and De'Ath (1989) even refer to 'partnership proneness'. The situation has become quite complicated and the barriers between education and social work could be breaking down. In the vanguard of this change is Strathclyde Regional Council who in 1985 set up a single department to deal with young children called the 'Pre-five unit' and located within education. Although the Children Act 1989 has chosen to maintain the distinction between the services, in practice there is such collaboration in some cases, that an observer finds it difficult to make the distinction.

■ Types of provision

This section sets out in more detail the kinds of services available in Scotland for the benefit of those unfamiliar with pre-five provision. Other readers would be advised to skip this section and move on to the next ('Availability of provision'). We have decided to present the services at this stage under broad areas reflecting to some extent the differences in emphasis in their function: childcare, education and play. There is considerable variation and some overlap between types of services which create difficulties for the development of a unified typology, and some individual centres do not fit easily into the categories.

From the Children Act 1989 *Review of services for children under eight* the following categories of services may be available. This section is not exhaustive, but is given to convey the diversity in provision. What follows is a description of each type as it applies across the country: specific descriptions of the types of services researched by the project are presented in Chapter 3, 'Methodology'.

Childcare services

Day nurseries

The term 'day nurseries' covers a range of centre-based group daycare services with different emphases on the education and care elements, family support and other services offered. This is a category where the nomenclature varies enormously, with a tendency for local authority regions to use different words to describe types of provision which are in fact similar. Such centres may also be known as 'community nurseries', 'children's centres' or 'family centres'.

Differences in management and funding are largely due to differences in historical background. Most such centres are managed by the social work department of the local authority, although Strathclyde Region has vested responsibility for all pre-five services in the education department. Elsewhere, some community nurseries are managed by education departments, and some are managed by the education and social work departments jointly.

In addition, considerable variation exists in terms of matters such as opening hours, entry requirements and priorities, and staffing. Staff have a range of qualifications and experience and may adopt a problem-solving approach in their work with families, often on a 'needs' basis. Many such centres adopt a 'neighbourhood' or 'community development' approach to their work, providing a focal point in the community for children and families and offering a range of services and activities such as part or full day care provision, adult education classes, clubs and groups for children and adults, and information exchanges. Parents attending are usually encouraged to become directly involved in the management of the centres. Centres such as child and/or family centres and children's centres offer flexible support to families.

The day nurseries also include combined (or joint) centres, community nurseries, nursery centres and open nurseries. These centres are usually managed by the education and/or social work department. They provide education and daycare for children from birth until school entry date and are open 48 to 52 weeks per year mainly between the hours of 08:30 and 17:30. Nursery centres are staffed by adults with a range of qualifications including teaching, social work and nursery nurse qualifications. A variety of support services such as home visiting, out of school care, parents' drop in and information and advice services, are often provided in these centres which have flexibility to meet local needs. Places for children are offered on a full-day or part-day basis.

Childminders

Childminders are individuals who look after children under the age of eight in domestic premises, usually the childminder's own home. They are self-employed and normally negotiate the terms and conditions with children's parents, who bear the cost of the service. However, local authorities make increasing use of sponsored childminders to meet their statutory obligations to children 'in need'. The total number of registered childminders more than trebled between March 1983 and March 1992 by which time there were over 8,000 childminders registered to care for nearly 20,000 children (Scottish Office 1994). A flexible daycare service is provided, usually all the year round.

By law childminders must register with their local social services department, although as many as one in five (or more) are thought not to be registered. Childminders are required, in general, to care for no more than three children under five including their own. In the past, childminders have had little training or support from the local authorities but there are new initiatives under way to provide both.

Home care

Some parents employ a parents' help, a nanny or au pair, to look after children in the family's own home. This is a private arrangement with both parties agreeing the terms and conditions. It may involve care for under-, as well as over-, fives to meet parental requirements for flexible or extended hours. The full costs are borne by parents.

Some nannies live with the family, some work on a daily basis. They are employees of the family but their status is not always clear and some may not have a contract of employment. Some families now use a shared nanny arrangement – in which one nanny looks after the children of two or more families. Nannies are excluded from regulation and control except when employed by more than two sets of parents when they have to be registered under the Children Act 1989. The availability of this service remains a largely unknown quantity due to the lack of regulation.

Employer nurseries or crèches

Employer nurseries or crèches provide a small number of places for the children of employees, or in some cases students of further and higher education establishments. Employer provided nurseries are run either directly by employers or by outside commercial firms.

Partnerships

As indicated above, partnership arrangements have been developed from day nurseries and involve a range of strategies for providing nursery provision between a variety of 'social partners' such as employers, development agencies and voluntary organisations. There may be some variation in the service provided depending on who the partners are, but usually the opening hours are long to accommodate working parents and the standards of local authority nurseries are maintained. Fees for families may be charged on a sliding scale depending on ability to pay, with employers being charged the full cost rate. Partnerships between employers and other partners including local authorities, development agencies and education and training organisations are promoted as a possible direction for future development, although they remain few in number in Scotland.

Private and voluntary nurseries

Private and voluntary nurseries provide daycare services, play and educational opportunities for children under school age on a commercial basis with parents meeting the full costs. They are usually open all year round and can care for children on a full or part-day basis. These nurseries may be managed by individual owners, companies or voluntary bodies. Other terms which may be used in this category of provision include work place nurseries and private nursery schools.

Playgroups

Most playgroups provide sessional care for children aged between three and five, although some will also cater for younger children. The playgroup movement stresses the role of parents as the prime educators of children and playgroups provide learning opportunities for children through the provision of structured play opportunities. Most are run by groups of parents with parent led committees, although some may be owned by individuals or organised by other voluntary bodies or the local authority. Playgroups rely heavily on parents/carers who volunteer their services although many also employ a paid playleader or assistant.

Gaelic medium playgroups are organised on the same basis as other playgroups and work to the same ends except that they have been established to support the development and use of Gaelic language in young children.

Children's homes

Children's homes are residential care settings for children, usually catering for older school aged children. Younger children are usually placed with foster parents *in loco parentis.*

Holiday play schemes

Holiday play schemes provide seasonal care arrangements and are managed by voluntary groups and occasionally by private organisations or the local authority. They cater mainly for school aged children and provide opportunities for children to participate in a broad range of leisure and educational activities, under supervision. Usually operating during school holidays, they provide part-day and full-day care for children. Many voluntary managed groups use school facilities during the holiday period. Some district councils provide holiday play schemes based for example in sports or leisure centres.

Education services

Local education authorities provide educational services for children under five and there are also educational services in the private sector.

Nursery classes, departments and schools

Nursery classes or departments are attached to primary schools and provide mainly part-day educational provision for 3-5 year old children. The head teacher of the primary school is responsible for the nursery class which is staffed by teachers and nursery nurses. Nursery classes open during the school year. Parents' rooms and support services such as those provided in nursery centres may be provided in conjunction with nursery classes. Additional services may be offered to those with special needs, eg home visiting teacher schemes. Attendance is free.

Nursery schools are similar to nursery classes, except that they are self governing services with their own head teacher, responsible for the nursery school which may be mainly staffed by nursery nurses. An assistant teacher or teachers may also be available in addition to the Head Teacher depending on the number of children attending. Parents' rooms and support services such as those provided in day nursery and family centres may be provided in nursery schools.

Primary schools (in the case of 4 year olds in P1 classes) are provided by the local education authority and offer formal education with less emphasis on the care element.

Private, grant aided and independent (nursery) schools

Private, grant aided and independent nursery schools may be managed by private individuals, companies or trusts and provide for fee paying pupils. Some independent schools are required to register with the Secretary of State for Scotland under section 98 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Some nurseries in this category gear their educational provision towards entry requirements for independent primary schools.

Play oriented and other services

A number of other pre-five services are also available. They are often play oriented and may support the family as well as the pre-five child. Some are centre based: adventure playgrounds, crèches and 'drop in' centres, parent and toddler groups, hospital care/play schemes, out of school clubs (for those pre-fives attending primary schools) and toy libraries. Others are characterised by their outreach approach: playbuses, home visiting and link schemes, homestart and Link-Up groups.

■ Availability of provision

The typology above reflects the broad range funding and administrative structures underpinning the various services for pre-five children. It should be borne in mind that the national picture is a dynamic one with the level of services continually expanding to meet the increase in demand and changing to meet the needs of children.

This variety may seem a strength in that it allows more choice, but some practitioners consider that the drawbacks outweigh the advantages. The Scottish early years education and childcare system is a patchwork quilt of provision. Services have developed independently with a variety of aims and practices, and with little evidence of an overall, co-ordinated and coherent policy framework. This may be due to the responsibility for the provision residing with several government ministries. Local authorities have been able to develop their services autonomously without necessary reference to what goes on in other Regions, and manage their own budgets. The national picture is a fragmented system lacking in sufficiency. As a result children and families may experience great differences in provision depending on where they live, or how old the children are. The parents' income will greatly influence which type of service, if any, is available to them: a problem often exacerbated in the case of families with children with special needs. The choice is limited for most of the population.

Demographic changes, such as changes in employment patterns, are often behind the rise in demand. A survey in Strathclyde Region, for example, showed that amongst the 1000 families surveyed, 63% of those women with a child under five who were not working would choose to work if suitable childcare was available, while a further 13% would choose to undertake further education (Scott 1989).

The level of provision also varies for different age groups, with better provision for three and four year olds in comparison with younger children. Recent figures for Scotland (SOED, 1994) show that at the national level local authority, voluntary and private registered day nurseries, registered playgroups and childminders provide sufficient places for about 23% of 0-4 year olds. However, day care places are available for over half (57%) of the three and four year old population and, in addition, places in local authority nursery schools are available for nearly 40% , although most of these places are part time and there are significant Regional differences in the level and pattern of provision.

According to recent figures (SOED 1994) the trend is for private and voluntary provision to grow more rapidly than local authority provision in terms of the number of places available. Since 1983 the number of daycare places in Scotland has grown by 55%, while local education authority nursery school places have seen an increase of 39% in the same period. In addition, the nursery school places expressed in terms of pupils in full-time equivalent education increased by 25.3%. There are no figures available for the actual number of children using these services or the number of children who use more than one service. The actual level of provision, therefore, is not as extensive as one might think from the raw figures.

Profile of provision in three Regions

Whatever the overall figures, pre five provision in Scotland varies enormously between and within Regions. This section will discuss the situation with reference to the three Regions - Borders, Fife, and Strathclyde - which participated in the research.

As Table 2.1 below shows, when places available in day nurseries, pre-school playgroups, and with childminders are considered as a percentage of the total population of under fives, it emerges that Borders is much better provided with such places than Fife and Strathclyde. In looking at information about pre-school playgroups, it is important to bear in mind that the number of places provided does not equate with the numbers of children who might attend. Playgroups may not operate ten sessions a week and any one child may not attend all sessions.

Table 2.1 *Day care places (day nurseries, pre-school playgroups, child minders) available March 1992*

	Number of places	Available as % of 0-4 population (326,131)
Scotland	**74,684**	**23**
Borders	1,903	31
Fife	4,990	22
Strathclyde	32,306	22

Source, Scottish Office April 1994

By contrast, in terms of children's attendance at nursery schools (and classes), as Table 2.2 shows, Borders has proportionally fewer children attending than either of the other two Regions. Fife has a large proportion, as does the Glasgow division of Strathclyde which has 51.7% of 3-4 year olds at nursery school. In another area of Strathclyde, Argyll and Bute Division, only 3.3% attended the one local education authority establishment.

Table 2.2 *Pupils in education authority nursery schools, September 1993*

	Number of pupils attending	Available as % of 3 and 4 year old population (130,426)
Scotland	**48,127**	**37**
Borders	486	20
Fife	4,460	49
Strathclyde	19,341	32

Source, Scottish Office April 1994

Fife and Borders have no large city, while Strathclyde has a number of conurbations as well as substantial rural areas. Such factors have implications for the kind of provision that can be made as sparseness of population limits the numbers of nursery schools and classes that it is feasible to run. In terms of the balance between nursery classes and nursery schools, although there will be divisional differences, Strathclyde as a whole has a larger proportion of nursery schools than classes compared with other Regions which tend to have nursery classes attached to primary schools.

Meeting the costs

While the number of nursery school places available has gone up, the level of staffing has not kept up with the growth in places. There are now (1993 figures) just under 8 pupils per member of staff, one more child per member of staff than 10 years ago (SOED 1994). Pre-five provision is costly due to the high staff/child ratio required. There have been many suggestions as to how the inherently high costs of early years provision can be met. Here we will mention but two: social partners and expansion of playgroup provision.

Social partners

The Childcare Network of the European Union's Commission has promoted a different kind of partnership to the parent/service partnerships mentioned above. This network of childcare experts from each of the countries in the European Union champion a widening of the economic basis of delivering pre-five provision, by including 'social partners' in the setting up and funding of services. Social partners include employers, local authorities, development agencies and other organisations involved in the communal responsibility for the care and education of young children. This is a concept that most other European countries embrace, while the tendency of the UK. would appear to be to resist it, putting the responsibility for child care on parents, though the widening of the economic base and the link with employers has been welcomed in principle by the government.

In some Regions of Scotland these types of partnership have been set up, sometimes jointly between local authorities and voluntary or charitable organisations. To our knowledge, employers have not responded to these calls, and there are very few, if any, childcare arrangements in Scotland involving employers. South of the border in England, the situation is slightly different with some employer partnerships or provision, such as that run by the Midland Bank. The current poor economic situation does not favour the development of employer partnerships which could be seen as a luxury, rather than as a step towards equal opportunities, by organisations which are having to work very hard to survive at all.

From a family's point of view, lack of daycare can have a serious effect on family income. Sylva (1992) quoted a study by Davies and Joshi which showed that British women forego half their child-free earnings when they become mothers. She points out the unfavourable comparison with other European countries 'This is an economic sacrifice not borne by mothers in France and Sweden, where childcare is more available and costs less', Royal Society of Arts Journal p.683 1992.

Expansion of playgroups

The other option centres around a re-appraisal of which types of provision should be developed to meet the increase in demand. The Pre-school Playgroup Association (1994) has, like other pre-five services, lobbied for an expansion of their type of provision, stressing the high level of parental involvement, the emphasis on the benefits of play oriented provision, and the much lower costs per child of running playgroups as opposed to local authority provision where accommodation and staff costs are considerably higher. This debate is also touched on by Sir Christopher Ball in his report (Royal Society of Arts 1994) though his suggestion of redirecting funds from the primary school sector to early education by increasing the compulsory school starting age to six (in line with most other European Union countries) is radically different. It seems reasonable to suggest that this debate is just starting and for a successful outcome there ought to be public debate around the issues.

■ Staffing

Staffing of pre-five services has been a major consideration in the discussion around the cost implications of different types of provision. It is accepted by all sides in the discussion that adults, educators and carers, play a significant role in furthering children's learning and development. The staff in pre-five services can be divided into three categories which are related to the historical care and education division in services, and the status of these groups reflects this background and societal values. Broadly speaking, there are teachers who are professionals with academic and pedagogical qualifications. There is a growing tendency for these teachers to have additional training in early childhood education. Nursery nurses (educational establishments) and care officers (care establishments) are professionals who have vocational qualifications in child development and care. Finally there are care assistants or workers, as well as volunteers, who are mainly uncertificated.

The difference in status and qualifications is reflected in the salaries of these staff. As services differ in the degree to which they employ staff from these groups, some services are more costly due to this factor alone. Many of the arguments about the types of services that are, or should be, offered to children and their families stem from this division. The division between the groups of staff, especially those with qualifications, are often irrelevant to the experiences that children and the families have in their face to face contact with the staff. Is the debate fuelled (in negative ways) by the professional hierarchy, conditions of service, pay and career structure, demarcated by professional organisations and interests?

There do not seem to be any quick and easy solutions to this problem. Experience from other European countries with well developed early years education services might be worth some consideration. Denmark has one of the most integrated childcare systems, and one feature of this system is that all the staff working in the early childhood and out of school services hold the same basic qualification, namely pedagogy. One could speculate

that, as services in Scotland develop, a unification in staffing structures and opportunities for a progressive scale of qualifications and career opportunities might overcome some, if not all, of the demarcation problems that have just been described. Some recent developments seem to lend support to such a line of thought: the overlap that exists in the roles of staff groups in the care and education of early years professionals; the extension of services to offer a place to all 4 year olds whose parents want it - as in Lothian - backed by the recent desire of the Prime Minister for such an extension; and the proposed graduate qualification suggested in England.

■ Benefits and quality

Pre-five provision in Scotland already costs a lot of money and questions have to be asked about the quality of the provision resulting from this investment. The evidence for the beneficial effects of high quality early years education and care has been reviewed in numerous sources. For example, Doherty (1991) reported the beneficial effects to include:

- greater social competency
- higher levels of language development
- higher developmental levels of play
- better ability to regulate own behaviour
- greater compliance with adults
- fewer behaviour problems in elementary school

In addition, a number of recent reports - the Rumbold report (DES 1990), the report from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (reported in Doherty 1991), the report from the National Commission on Education (1993), the High/Scope Perry Pre-school Study (Schweinhart and Weikart 1993), and the RSA report (RSA 1994) - all conclude that there are significant benefits for children in both the short term and long term resulting from high quality early education and care. The empirical base for these conclusions is arguably narrower than could be desired, but the trends highlighted in these reports and the strength of the professional opinion in this area can certainly not be ignored. Two interlinked considerations emerging from the literature and from current debates on quality as value for money, need to be addressed. These are 'What is quality?' and 'What are the cost/benefit ramifications of extensive pre-five provision?

There is agreement that interpretations of quality change with society's values. For example, emphasis in day nurseries has changed form providing compensations for home circumstances (a deficit model) to involving and helping parents to improve what the home provides (a partnership model). The partnership between parents and teachers/ nursery staff is a major thrust of the Children Act 1989. Its importance is also emphasised by the Rumbold Committee of Inquiry (DES 1990) which endorsed the view expressed by the House of Commons Committee Report (1988) that parental involvement is essential to the success of early education.

There is also consensus that a number of factors or dimensions need to be taken into consideration in this debate. A number of alternative conceptions have been put forward, partly because quality indicators overlap considerably and can therefore be combined in different ways depending on where the focus is. To illustrate this consider the relationship between staff and children, which can be viewed as an outcome of policy (centre view), staff training (staff view) or the environment (child view). To complicate matters, quality

can be viewed from a yet wider perspective (society, community or parent view) where coherence and continuity between services might be a focus.

In order to consider these finer points of what constitutes quality in early education and care, and to widen the debate, the European Commission's Childcare Network produced a discussion document based on an earlier seminar (Balageur et al 1991), and this document contains criteria listed under the following ten headings which can be used in thinking about quality: accessibility and usage; environment; learning activities; relationships; parents' views; the community; valuing diversity; assessment of children and outcome measures; cost benefits; ethos.

An alternative list was developed more than twenty years ago by Harms and Clifford (1981). Their quality indicators were expressed in the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS), which has been one of the major instruments used for measuring quality (eg Wilkinson et al 1993). It was used by the project and is described more fully in the next chapter: 'Methodology' (section 2a 'ECERS').

In relation to the quality of educational outcomes, Ferré Laevers (1993) and his associates have developed a model of experiential learning in which he argues that learning is the central aspect of early education. Based on Piagetian and cognitive theories of learning, the deepest levels can only be reached through high levels of psychological 'involvement' in a task. Through his work in Leuven he has developed a number of behavioural indicators, eg posture, expression, length on task and concentration. This model was also used by the project and is discussed further in chapter 3 'Methodology' (section on 'Child Observations').

Where does that leave us with regard to an understanding of 'quality'? The literature suggest that quality can be conceived of as a series of dimensions or aspects of a service. Which dimensions are chosen as worthy of attention is a matter of values, as is the relative weight accorded to any given dimension. The trend amongst practitioners and some academics lean towards a consensus that the European Commission's Childcare Network's ten dimensions represent as fair a picture as is achievable today.

■ Summary

In setting the scene for this project, we have tried to provide a sufficiently detailed picture to convey the broad context of pre-five provision and the types of provision most likely to be encountered in Scotland. Some of the issues raised are to do with the balance between educational provision and care, which has implications for staffing and what might comprise the curriculum. Any judgements about quality must be relevant to the holistic nature of young children's learning processes including the personal and social learning that has to take place.

3 Methodology

Introduction

As indicated in Chapter 1, the overall intention of the research was to identify ways in which the various types of pre-five provision contribute to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of children, including those with special needs. It was important to tap into the range of provision specified in the research proposal: childminders, local authority day nurseries, private day nurseries, nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools, playgroups, family centres, community nurseries, children's centres, and employer/partnership nurseries.

On the one hand local authorities are empowered to, and usually do, make provision for children under five, but they are not legally required to do so. Pre-five educational provision provided by a local education authority (LEA) is not compulsory for families in the way that schooling is for 5 year olds. On the other hand local authorities are legally required to provide services for children 'in need'. This has led to great variation in the amounts and types of provision available not only nationally but also at regional level, particularly in the case of the larger regions . This variation had to be taken into account when constructing research instruments, which required to be sensitive to the relevant range of provision. A description of the types of provision found in Scotland is outlined in Chapter 2, 'Context of pre-five provision in Scotland' while the categories that were used in this study are detailed below.

It was not possible to cover the whole of Scotland over the two years of the project, and so the study was limited to three Regions (Borders, Fife and Strathclyde), which together account for 54% of the pre-five population of Scotland (1983 figures). Between them they provide a range of rural/urban areas, administrative structures, and provision types, and all are within reasonable travelling distance of the research team headquarters in Edinburgh. All three Regions are represented on Children in Scotland's Early Years Forum.

The project employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collecting information, dove-tailing the evidence from the various relevant sources to answer each of the Research Questions. The methods adopted proved to be appropriate, and made an interesting combination of survey, interview, and observation data, including the use of an environmental rating scale and individual and group interviews, some of which were based on photographs of children in pre-five settings. Visits were made to a sample of centres but not to childminders, who were included only in the postal survey. We reflect on these methods in the course of this chapter and in the final chapter of the report.

Research Questions

Detailed Research Questions were clarified in the context of the aims specified in Chapter 2 'Aims of the project', before the team worked out the most appropriate approach and specific methods and timetable. The resulting Research Questions are set out as follows.

1 How do pre-school experiences outside the home relate to children's experiences during the first stages of formal schooling? To what extent in practice does provision facilitate coherence in children's learning from the first phases of learning outside the home and the initial stages of formal education, as indicated in the 5–14 Development Programme?

Children's experiences before school have a bearing on their opportunities to achieve the learning expressed in the targets set out in the 5–14 curriculum guidelines. It was therefore felt appropriate to match the behaviour and expectations of children's learning in pre-five contexts with the prerequisites of the 5–14 guidelines. This required some form of observation of activities in pre-five centres as well as clarification of the intentions of the staff in the centres which could be put in the context of the 5–14 guidelines.

Children's educational experiences in pre-five centres may or may not match parental expectations and provider intentions, whether in relation to the 5–14 curriculum or in other terms. Parents and providers might have high expectations of children's educational performance, matched by pre-school provision to promote it. It is, however, possible that such high expectations would not be matched by the experiences and facilities offered by providers, or that parents and providers have relatively low explicit expectations of children who in practice have very high quality educational experiences. The final possibility is the combination of low expectations and poor quality educational experiences, not easily associated with the basis for the 5–14 curriculum.

In observing and collecting information about provisions relevant to these issues, we therefore needed to distinguish between:

- the facilities and experiences that providers believe they offer
- the actual facilities and experiences provided
- the nature and extent of children's use of the available facilities
- the providers' role in monitoring and enhancing children's use of the available facilities

However this Research Question is not just about preparation for the 5–14 curriculum and its assessment. It also concerns broader aspects of how the experiences children have in pre-five settings outside their own family care prepare them for subsequent formal schooling. While not all children's learning in pre-school provisions can or should be directly connected with the formal school curriculum, there are areas of such learning which are clearly related. There are also skills which may be the foundation of subsequent formal learning, and experiences which may facilitate the transition to the social organisation of school, thereby enhancing learning outcomes. Addressing these issues entailed being alert to all information suggesting the various skills and activities encouraged by pre-five providers and/or demonstrated in the pre-five settings. Other evidence was sought in the deliberate and coincidental links made between the pre-five providers and schools - such as the use of other agencies or the passing on of children's records.

2 What is the balance between educational and social provision for children of different ages and how well is this matched to the diverse needs of families and communities from different rural and urban locations and their socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds?

Views were sought from the Regions, parents and providers about what constitutes an appropriate balance between supporting the social-emotional needs of parents and their families and the range of needs for the children concerned. For example, variety in language, toys, books, pictures and facilities (and in how they were utilised by adults and children) was an important area to consider, and links to the 5–14 curriculum guidelines were again relevant.

Concerning age, children in their pre-school year have rather different needs from those who are younger. This is especially relevant in considering pre-five provision which has come into being primarily in response to families' social needs for childcare as compared to that which has emerged in order to address the social, developmental, and educational needs of children. Provision availability also reflects resource allocation issues, whether in widely dispersed areas of population or in populations of high density in cities and towns.

3 What contributions to children's development are claimed and how does practice match up to this?

The practice of staff in early years provision is a crucial factor in relation to the quality of the service provided and its impact on child development. Addressing this question meant comparing explicit claims made by providers with actual practice. There is nearly always a gap between intended and actual practice. This arises for a variety of reasons: because practitioners have little time to reflect on their work, for example. However, the difference need not be wide and some providers may well be able to meet their own goals.

4 What provision is made for children with special needs in relation to cognitive, physical and emotional aspects of development?

This question concerns how (if at all) special needs are identified and the extent to which extra support is provided for such children. It was also considered important to explore inter-agency collaboration in the identification and support of children with special needs and the ways in which parental opinion is taken into account in these circumstances.

5 How are the preferences and needs of parents/carers catered for in matters such as costs, hours, communication, involvement, help and expectations of benefit?

Addressing this question meant investigating the extent to which the various types of provision for pre-school care matched the needs of families, and seeking to identify the problems confronting parents, providers and Regional authorities in this regard. For example, an attempt was made to investigate the cost per child to parents for each type of service.

6 Is the best use made of resources in providing the service? How do benefits (defined as perceived short-term advantages) in relation to costs vary among the different types of provision?

There are Regional differences in methods of funding and the kinds of support services provided by social work and education departments, for example in relation to staff development and training. Information from parents, providers, and local authorities would illuminate these points and provide examples of resourcing and services. Although benefits should be interpreted ultimately in terms of children's welfare, the means of supporting their various carers must be pertinent.

7 How does the authority monitor and assess quality within the group/class, within the centre and within the authority?

Addressing this question meant establishing the nature of the Regions' infrastructures for quality assurance both in relation to their own aims and in relation to the legal requirements specified in respect of childminding, day care and education services in The Children Act 1989. All Regions have a mission statement setting out their aims and priorities. They have also developed distinct monitoring and evaluation procedures to ensure the quality of pre-five care, drawing on different sources of information. Some of this information is published; other components are less publicly available. An essential ingredient of any quality service is the quality of staff; the arrangements for appointment and opportunities for career development and inservice training were therefore relevant to this question.

8 What do participants perceive as good quality childcare provision?

The research team is aware that 'quality in provision' is a thorny issue. Is it reasonable to expect consensus about what makes good quality provision for young children? Certainly there could be discrepancies in perception between different kinds of provider and between providers and parents. At the same time there are likely to be areas of common agreement, such as putting safety as a priority.

■ Categorisation of provision for research purposes

The research proposal specified that the project consider the following categories of pre-five provision.

Nursery schools: including local education authority nursery schools and local education authority nursery classes within primary schools. Nursery schools and classes were pooled because they are broadly similar, though some nursery schools have become 'open' nurseries with extended hours and services. This group did not contain nursery/intake classes in private (boarding) schools in the independent sector.

Day nurseries: including day nurseries, family centres children's centres, and community nurseries: all run by the local authorities. This category is arguably the most mixed, including both 'traditional' day nurseries managed by social work departments and community nurseries managed by education departments, as well as nurseries managed by the education and social work departments jointly. In addition, considerable variation

exists in terms of matters such as opening hours, entry requirements and priorities, and staffing. This is also a category where the nomenclature varies enormously, with a tendency for local authority regions to use different words to describe types of provision which are in fact similar.

Private nurseries: operated by individuals or organisations, including employer nurseries/ crèches and children's centres/nurseries run by voluntary organisations. Again there is considerable variation within this category. This category did not include nursery/intake classes in private schools.

Partnership nurseries: Partnership nurseries are a new and innovative development in pre-five provision. Few exist. We encountered two types of partnership nursery in two different Regions. In one Region, partnership nurseries were part of a larger joint public/ privately funded socio-economic regeneration programme, providing inexpensive childcare for people resident within the designated regeneration area. In the other Region the partnership nurseries were run jointly by the District and Regional Councils providing childcare primarily for working parents, including parents living elsewhere but working within the area.

Playgroups: generally managed by parent committees under the leadership of a playleader. Membership of the Scottish Pre-school Playgroup Association (SPPA) is typical, but not a requirement. This category is to some extent based on the voluntary work of parents who participate in the sessions, although the extent of such participation can vary greatly both within and between playgroups.

Childminders: provide care in domestic premises, normally their own home, and differ from the other categories of provider in that they are not group providers as such, although they may care for more than one child at the same time. Only registered childminders were approached to participate in the survey part of the project.

Generally speaking there was little difficulty in allocating a given centre to our categories, although there was some debate in respect of a few centres. For example, one centre used 'nursery school' in its name, but both staff and the research team agreed that it should be categorised as a day nursery.

■ Overall approach to collecting evidence

The Research Questions together presented a considerable challenge, which could only be met by a combination of quantitative and qualitative components in the research design.

In the first instance it was necessary to gain a profile of current provision. Accordingly, samples of the five provision types set out above were the subject of a postal questionnaire survey.

However, the limitations of self-completion questionnaires constrained the range of open ended questions which could be included, and some of the major research questions required more discursive approaches and/or actual observation of as many pre-five provisions as feasible within the project budget and timetable. Also, issues concerning the

relationship between pre-five activities and the 5–14 curriculum guidelines required observation of children in pre-five provision for comparison with analysis of the curriculum guidelines. It was therefore decided to complement the questionnaire survey by visiting a limited number of centres offering different kinds of provision in order to obtain rich and detailed information on these centres through use of the following techniques: ratings on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, parent and staff interviews, child observations, staff observations, and interviews with centre leaders. Childminders were not included in this part of the research in view of resource and logistical considerations.

In addition, two supplementary sources were tapped in order to investigate arrangements for quality assurance. Regional officers employed in education and social work were interviewed, and Regional reviews of daycare and related services for young children published in response to the requirements of the 1989 Children Act were analysed.

Although individual members of the voluntary sector associations gave information through questionnaires and interviews, the project only had formal discussions with the Scottish Pre-School Playgroup Association. It was not part of the Project's remit to consult with other groups which relate to work with children in the early years.

■ Timetable of research activity

The project was spread over two years from September 1992, with fieldwork and analysis undertaken from March 1993 to June 1994. The work can be grouped into three phases, as follows:

Phase 1: Development (September 1992 - February 1993)

- Survey of literature and consultation
- Analysis of 5–14 curriculum documents
- Development and trial of instruments including questionnaires, observation and interview schedules
- Contact with Regions, selection and contacting centres for detailed study

Phase 2: Main fieldwork (March 1993 - January 1994)

- Questionnaire survey (March-April) and preliminary analysis of data
- First visit to centres for detailed study: staff and parent interviews (photos), child observations (March to June)
- Second visit to centres for detailed study (June to January): ECERS, staff observation and discussion, centre leader interviews

Phase 3: Remaining fieldwork, and analysis (January 1994 - August 1994)

- Analyses of observations, interviews and Regional documents
- Regional officers' interviews
- Preparation of final report

Summary of data collection methods

The data collection methods used are summarised below.

1 A postal survey of providers covering a range of provision types.

2 A more detailed investigation of group providers in a selection of study centres, comprising:

(a) deployment of the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS);

(b) parent and staff interviews;

(c) child observations;

(d) staff observations and follow up interview discussions;

(e) interviews with centre leaders.

3 An investigation of Regional arrangements for quality assurance, comprising:

(a) Interviews with Regional officers employed in education and social work.

(b) Analyses of Regional reviews of daycare and related services for young children

Further details about the above methods are given in the sections which follow. These details include information about respondents, the nature of the information collected, the procedures followed, the method of analysis adopted, and any issues arising from the approach used.

1 The providers' questionnaire survey

Introduction

Almost one thousand questionnaires were dispatched to samples of each of the following types of provision :

- nursery schools and classes;
- day nurseries, family centres, children's centres and community nurseries;
- private nurseries and partnership nurseries;
- playgroups;
- childminders.

Details of these categories are provided in the section on 'Categorisation of provision for research purposes' above.

The person in charge of the centre was asked to complete the questionnaire. (In the case of nursery classes this was the person in charge of the class/unit and not the primary school head teacher.)

The survey elicited substantial factual information on matters such as staff qualifications, available facilities, hours of operation, and charges, as well as more subjective information such as ratings of the importance of particular aims in relation to the centre, and assessments of the benefits perceived to result from attendance. Findings have been used to make comparisons between the different types of pre-five provision and are reported in Chapter 4, 'What is on offer for pre-fives'.

Questionnaire construction

As a result of the variation in provision types to be covered, the basic questionnaire required to be adapted for use with certain providers, while retaining maximum

comparability. All group providers with the exception of playgroups received an identical questionnaire. In the case of playgroups, the questionnaire used differed in only one substantial way: the section which asked about staffing was adapted for playleaders and the parents who normally work alongside them on the rota. A modified version was also required for child minders, whose position is in many ways different from that of other providers.

It was recognised that the questionnaire would have to make provision for some open responses. This would allow a degree of standardisation in the questions being asked of different kinds of provision, while at the same time allowing for the expected variation in the range of answers that would be received. Open responses would also allow maximum freedom of expression in relation to more discursive issues such as perceptions of the benefits to children resulting from attendance at the centre, which were central to some of the research questions.

In order to cover the range of relevant issues, the questionnaires required to be fairly long and involved. However, an attempt was made to maintain a balance between collecting information and achieving a high enough response rate to make such information usable. Piloting took place with a selection of relevant providers in centres not included in the final sample, as a result of which the questionnaire was amended as required.

Copies of the questionnaires used for the survey are available on request.

Samples and Response Rates

Samples for our postal questionnaire survey were drawn using information from the three participating Regions on the nature and extent of existing provision. Centre samples were based on the number of establishments and not on the actual numbers of children using them and were selected to give a representative geographical spread across and within the Regions.

For most provision types - nursery schools and classes, private nurseries, and playgroups - we opted for a sample of 1 in 4. In the case of childminders, involving 1 in 4 would have yielded too many responses (in relation to time and resource considerations), and so a sample of 1 in 10 was used. On the other hand, in the case of partnership nurseries, day nurseries, children's centres, and family centres, we selected the whole population since it is relatively small, aware that postal surveys tend to elicit low response rates.

Sample sizes and response rates are summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: *Questionnaire survey: sample sizes and response rates*

Provision Type	Sample Size	Number of Responses	Response Rate %
Nursery schools and classes	115	67	58
Day nurseries, community nurseries, and family centres	83	46	55
Private nurseries and partnership nurseries	70	31	44
Playgroups	299	159	53
Childminders	418	186	45

The highest response rates were from the nursery schools, day nurseries, and playgroups, while response rates were lower in the case of private nurseries and childminders. In view of the fact that the questionnaires were fairly sizeable documents which contained a

substantial number of open ended questions, the above response rates are higher than might have been expected. This is particularly so of responses from childminders and from playgroups. Childminders tend to mind for relatively short periods (see Chapter 4, 'What is on offer for pre-fives'), and therefore the lists of names and addresses from which the sample was selected, although the most up to date which could be acquired, proved unreliable. In the light of this, the childminders' response rates should be viewed favourably. In the case of playgroups, especially those operating in hired premises on a part time basis, there was a degree of uncertainty about whether the appropriate person would receive the questionnaire at all. It was apparent from some telephone enquiries received that there was some justification to this concern.

Analysis of responses

Whilst including a number of open ended questions had benefits in terms of simplifying questionnaires for use with different providers, it meant that there had to be an intermediate step in the form of drawing up categories for analysis based on responses received, before coding could take place. These were derived by checking through responses in a sample of returned questionnaires. Questionnaires were then coded and processed for analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

Reflections on the survey

Survey research has a longer established track record than the more innovative research methods used by this project, consequently there was relatively little to learn from this exercise. However, as in the case of any survey using open ended questions, based on analysis of the responses received a questionnaire with fewer open ended questions could now be created for future use.

2 Data collection methods in study centres

Introduction

A number of centres were investigated in depth using five separate research procedures: (a) deployment of the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, (b) parent and staff interviews based on photographs, (c) child observations in the context of the 5–14 curriculum, (d) staff observations with follow up interview discussions, and interviews with centre leaders. This required two visits to be made to each study centre. Appendices 3.1a and 3.1b provide a brief description of each of the study centres and its locality, together with details of those who participated in the research.

Childminders were not included in this part of the research in view of resource and logistical considerations. As individual providers, an in-depth research exercise encompassing a sufficient number of childminders would merit a separate study.

Selection of centres

In the light of the budgetary and logistical constraints on the project it was decided that sixteen centres would be a sufficient number to investigate in this way. Centres visited were selected from among those which had responded to the questionnaire, and with the approval of officers from the three Regions concerned. With five categories of provision across three Regions in a range of physical, geographical, and social settings this was not straightforward. In order to achieve a reasonable representation of the range of provision, Regional distributions in terms of the number of centres of each type and the number of

children catered for were considered, leading to provisional numbers for each category of provision. There are few partnership nurseries, but it was decided to represent these among the centres for in-depth study as they constitute a relatively recent and innovative development in pre-five provision. Factors such as rural/urban location, multi-ethnic setting, traditional/innovative approach were also taken into account. Some relevant information about the centres was available from the survey questionnaires, which helped in the selection process. By sifting through this information and looking at the Local Authorities' descriptions of centres a final selection was arrived at. The sixteen centres thus selected for more detailed study comprised:

- 5 nursery schools or classes
- 3 day nurseries or community nurseries
- 2 private nurseries
- 2 partnership nurseries
- 4 playgroups

Details of these categories are provided in the section on 'Categorisation of provision for research purposes' above.

2a The early childhood environmental rating scale

Introduction

In recent years there have been a number of attempts to develop instruments to indicate how a child's environment rates on a range of criteria. The most popular of these is the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) produced by Thelma Harms and Richard M. Clifford (1981). It is designed to provide a diagnostic indication of any aspects of provision which may be in need of attention or development, and as such the ECERS has most commonly been used for in-centre development. However, while the ECERS is primarily intended for in-centre use, it has also been found to be useful as a research tool and was used as such most recently in the Scottish context by Wilkinson et al (1993). In the case of the present project, the ECERS rating scale was used to provide information about the selected centres on a range of standardised indicators relating to qualitative issues, allowing a degree of comparison both between and within different types of provision and providing information complementary to that collected by other means.

The ECERS scale relates to the following aspects of the environment - the use of space, the use of materials and experiences to enhance children's development, the daily schedule, and the supervision provided - and allows a visual profile rating children's environment to be constructed comprising scores on the following seven sub-scale components:

- personal care routines;
- furnishings and displays;
- language and reasoning experiences;
- fine and gross motor activities;
- creative activities;
- social development; and
- adult needs.

For a fuller description of these components see the introduction to Chapter 5, 'Where children and staff work', which reports on findings.

Scoring the scale

The seven sub-scales are each split into a number of elements for scoring purposes, although the actual number of elements to be rated varies. For example, within personal care routines there are seven elements to be scored, while for language and reasoning experiences there are only four. Clear descriptors are provided for each of the elements to be scored, as are rating criteria giving guidelines as to how to allocate a score on the scale. Each element is scored from one to seven, one indicating the absence and seven the maximum presence and/or use of a particular element. For an element to merit a particular score all of the criteria prescribed for that score have to be present in addition to those prescribed for lower scores.

The scoring procedure had to be slightly modified for use with the range of providers covered by the project, as several of the elements on the scale were not applicable for certain providers. For example, in the case of playgroups the provision of sleeping areas and meals for children (who may be attending sessions of less than two hours) is not relevant. In order to overcome this problem while still allowing for comparability of the data it was decided that elements deemed inappropriate for use would be ascribed a median (neutral) score of four.

When all the elements have been scored, the ratings for each of the elements are summed to provide a total score for each of the seven sub scales. These scores are transferred to a graph (see Appendix 5) to create a visual representation of the environment rating. Scales on these graphs are adjusted to reflect the varying number of elements within the sub-scales, thus allowing direct comparisons of ratings on the various sub-scales to be made.

Using the scale

In order to help standardise use of the scale on the part of the two researchers who were to carry out this part of the study, a pilot exercise was carried out in a children's centre. This involved both researchers observing the same activities and events, rating these on the various elements, and discussing together their reasons arriving at such scores. It was apparent that the vast majority of the scoring decisions made by the researchers were identical, and so confidence in their reliability was arrived at. The unambiguous descriptions and guidelines provided for the scale no doubt contributed to the high degree of agreement in the researchers' ratings.

Ideally it would have been preferable to carry out observations on a number of occasions in each centre, using more than one observer on each visit before producing an overall profile for each of the sixteen centres. However, this was not possible given the time constraints in force. The scale was utilised over an observation period of approximately two hours, including the children's lunch break where appropriate. Observations were also conducted in any additional areas and facilities which were accessible to the children on a daily basis.

Many of the elements which referred to the physical condition, facilities and layout of the playroom could be observed and rated immediately. If at the end of the observation period some of the elements had not been observed then staff members were asked about them in a non-leading fashion; prompts for doing this are provided as part of the scale.

On completion of the observation and scoring of the various elements comprising each of the sub scales a profile was drawn up for each of the case study centres. These were then combined by provision type to produce graphs showing average values and the range of

scores encountered on each of the scales, along with lines indicating both minimal and good provision as defined by Harms and Clifford.

Reflections on use of the ECERS

The ECERS is relatively simple to use, but has certain limitations. The construction of the scale reflects a distinct set of ideas and values on what a quality environment should have. For example separate rooms for specific purposes such as parents' or staff use are deemed desirable. Yet having rooms set aside for a specific purposes can lead to under use and thus inefficient use of resources. Equally, the central role of parents in a child's development is largely ignored by the rating scale.

Although the scales on the graphs are organised in such a fashion so as to carry equal weight visually, it was felt that some are in fact more salient in terms of meeting children's needs than others. For example, it could be argued that a high rating on Creative Activities or Social Development should be looked upon more favourably than a high rating on Adult Needs.

The strength of the ECERS lies in providing comparative information on qualitative issues. As such, it is appropriate for large scale use, and in order to make firmer comparisons it would have been preferable to have conducted the ECERS rating exercise on a large number of centres than proved practical in view of time and resource considerations.

2b Parent and staff interviews based on photographs

Introduction

In order to explore providers' and parents' perceptions of quality in pre-five services and provision an interview schedule using photographs as stimulus material was devised and piloted. The basis of these interviews was a projective exercise using a set of nine photographs showing children and adults engaged in a range of activities in various pre-five establishments.

Creating the photographic set

The photographs used were selected from well over a hundred taken by the researchers on visits to a number of centres which were not included in our study group of sixteen. We discussed the choice of photographs with various academics, practitioners and interested parties in an attempt to cover as many variables and issues as possible with a small set of photographs. In selecting photographs it was not possible to cover all scenarios: it was felt that the nine photographs selected represented an optimum balance in relation to the length of the interview as against the degree of comprehensiveness of what the photographs cover. The selection includes examples of children at play using different activities and materials, and in different sizes of group with some including adults and others not. In order to stimulate discussion, it was thought important to include images of multicultural materials and adults and children from different ethnic backgrounds. It was also thought important to include images of children with special needs and to have at least one situation where a man was present. (The photographs used can be viewed by arrangement with SCRE.)

Some aspects of quality in pre-5 provision - staff development issues, for example - are difficult to capture in a photograph. Informants were asked directly by the researchers about such areas. Responses were recorded on a schedule containing a number of broad

headings which were used by the researcher to ensure a degree of uniformity in interviews and to provide a set of standard prompts for areas that respondents may not have spontaneously spoken about. These headings and prompts were culled from several sources including the European Commission Childcare Network's discussion document (Ballaguer, Mestres and Penn 1991), the Rumbold report (DES 1990), as well as our own ideas on issues which have a bearing on quality.

The interviews

In each of the sixteen centres we sought to interview a range of child care staff, including a teacher if present. In most centres three or four staff took part, with a total of fifty staff interviewed, three of whom were male. For logistical reasons and as a demonstration of our good faith we asked the centres to select staff, including a teacher if present on the staff and to contact parents and arrange interviews with them for us. This resulted in interviews with fifty nine parents including four fathers. We supplied information about forthcoming interviews for the staff and, via staff, the parents.

Staff were interviewed individually but parents could, and often did, elect to be interviewed together, resulting in group interviews of between two and seven.

While the exercise was introduced and conducted in the same way with both parents and staff, we recognised that it would be exploring different perspectives since the position of parents in relation to the children is clearly different from that of staff. With staff we were exploring their aims, priorities and values. In the case of parents we were investigating their experience and expectations of educational practice and child development activities as well as seeking some indication of their values in child rearing.

The interview began with a statement that we were interested in staff's and parents' ideas about good quality pre-five provision and practice and how their own experiences measured up to this. We either asked them to look through the photographs one at a time, identifying elements in them which they liked or disliked and explaining why, or we laid out the photographs and asked them to select those which for them highlighted good quality and practice. The variation depended on individual circumstances, such as location of the interview and the number of interviewees present. Photographs were numbered and the relevant number recorded next to any comments.

Questioning by the researcher was kept to a minimum, eg asking for some clarification of answers, or prompting on some of the areas on the checklist that had not been covered in the interviewees unprompted comments. From making statements about the photographs respondents were, if necessary, encouraged to reflect on their specific situation, and to assess the images shown in the photographs in relation to their general comments on quality.

Interviews normally took 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

Analysis of responses

Each statement from the interviewees was allocated an identifier which recorded the name of the centre, the type of provision, and whether the response was made by a parent or staff member. In the case of a staff member, the identifier would also indicate their position. For the purposes of analysis this allowed information to be moved around and grouped under categories as appropriate while still allowing the status of the individual to be identified.

A sample of interviews were considered by the research team in order to get a feel for the information and type of statements being made. From such readings suitable categories for analysis began to emerge. These categories were rechecked and refined by reading through further samples of interview responses. Many of the statements made by respondents in case study interviews encompassed complex and multi layered ideas about the pre-5 environment, for example in relation to children's learning and the kind of situations, activities and methods which facilitate or hinder this. For the research, this created complexities of classification and categorisation, with statements pertinent to a range of issues classified under more than one heading.

Analysis of these findings is reported in Chapter 6, 'Staff and Parents Perspectives'.

Reflections on the method used for staff and parent interviews

Both spontaneous and prompted feedback from respondents suggested that they found this technique both non-threatening and helpful in formulating their ideas. The format helped respondents recognise that there were no 'right' answers and that the researcher, by listening to them for extended periods, was demonstrating a genuine interest in their opinions and ideas. This helped confirm one element of our rationale for using this particular method: that it helped engender confidence in a setting which might otherwise be perceived as threatening.

It was also felt that this methodology produced a very flexible tool which could be used not only for research, but also (as several staff and members of Her Majesty's Inspectorate pointed out) as a staff development or training tool.

This method's success in encouraging and stimulating people to explore and talk about issues of quality in pre-5 provision meant that it generated vast amounts of information and consequently a sizeable amount of time had to be allocated to the task of analysis.

Participation in this exercise required some organisation on the part of the study centres since cover had to be supplied for the members of staff who were interviewed. As results of these interviews are broadly in line with the findings of the questionnaire survey on common areas, we can say with a fair degree of confidence that the sample of staff interviewees was probably representative of staff in general.

The situation with respect to the data collected from the parental interviews is however less clear. Since parental opinions and ideas were only sought in this exercise there is not a corresponding source against which to cross reference the findings. Given the logistics involved, the only practicable way for the project to conduct parental interviews was for study centres to make the required arrangements, and this may well have influenced the type and characteristics of the parents who took part. Most centre leaders were aware of the problems associated with such a 'sampling technique' and some said that they had attempted to present the researchers with a 'range' of parents. Nonetheless certain groups, such as working parents - particularly those working full time - are doubtlessly under-represented.

However, the in-depth nature of the interviews may help engender confidence in the generalisability of the data since the interactive nature of the technique allowed interviewees to reflect and discuss their ideas and experiences, a process which in itself would likely throw up any inconsistencies in the data.

2c Child observations

Introduction

This section describes the detailed observations of 127 children in the 16 case study centres, who were observed in every day activities in their pre five settings during the spring term of 1993.

The aim of the child observations in the study centres was twofold. First, they served to illuminate the experiences that facilitate coherence in children's learning from the first phases of learning outside the home and the initial stages of compulsory education, as indicated in the 5–14 curriculum guidelines, which relates to Research Question 1. Second, the observations were employed to illuminate aspects of the children's activities which would reflect the quality of their experiences in the different types of provision, to include the social context and the level of involvement in activities. In the centres where there were one or more children with special needs the observations were specifically targeted at them, and the findings from these observations are therefore also particularly relevant to issues in connection with Research Question 4.

It would also be possible to triangulate the findings with some of the more general perceptions about the quality of provision as it is explored in Research Question 8.

A letter was sent to all relevant parents informing them of the research and asking them to indicate if they did not wish their child to be involved.

What was done

The observations focused on four aspects of the children's activities:

(a) the content of the activities,

(b) the process areas of the activities,

(c) the number of other children and adults that were involved in those activities,

(d) the level of involvement of the observed children.

Instruments for child observations

It was a difficult task to find an instrument suited to our purposes because there is, to our knowledge, no literature available surveying the methods and instruments available for observing young children focusing on their activities in terms of the curriculum. There are some observation schedules for observing individual pupils and teachers' contact with pupils, but they are designed with older children in mind (Cohen 1976). The main instruments we considered were the observation instrument used in playgroups by Kathy Sylva and her colleagues (Sylva et al. 1980), the 'Keele Pre-School Assessment Guide' (Tyler 1979) and 'Pre-School Behaviour Checklist' (PBCL) developed by McGuire and Richman (1988).

There can be little doubt that the Oxford pre-school instrument is a useful one (Sylva et al. 1980). It is an excellent basis for the observation of a variety of behaviours, but the categories used did not lend themselves to a comparison with the 5–14 guidelines. We also envisaged problems using this instrument across different kinds of provision. Since both of the other two instruments focus on the psychological (as opposed to educational) aspects of individual children, we felt that these scales would need to be used in conjunction with a deeper understanding of each child. We could not hope to achieve that kind of involvement in the short time we had at our disposal. Because there was not an educationally oriented observation instrument relevant to our aim it was decided that we would need to develop our own observation schedule.

To get the specificity required in observations, it was decided to look at the context, content, and process of activities that children would engage in. These particular aspects of activities were used because they are recognised areas for planning and analysing activities, particularly within the Early Years Curriculum (Lothian Regional Council 1992; Strathclyde Regional Council, 1994).

Development of observation instrument

The observation schedule was created specially for the purpose of this study. It covered the four aspects of the children's activities mentioned above:

- the content area of the activity in which the observed child was engaging;
- the process area of this activity;
- the social context, ie number of children in target child's group and number of adults involved in the activity of the child or group;
- the observed child's involvement with or in an activity.

The ***content*** and ***process*** areas are constructs that are generally used in planning and assessing activities within the areas of the formal curriculum. In this case they were defined with reference to Level A targets of the attainment outcomes of the 5–14 Guidelines (5–14) published by the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED). We looked at the targets for language; mathematics; environmental studies; expressive arts; and religious & moral education. The content and process categories were thus interpretations of the 5–14 constructed but we wanted to ensure that they were also seen in terms of experiences likely to be found in all pre-school group settings. The categories were therefore selected through an iterative process going from guidelines to children's actual experiences and vice versa. The categories had to be general enough to include the rich variety of ways in which certain experiences are provided for the children, for example *writing* (process category 'y') would include 'scribbling' and marking objects to signify ownership. The categories also had to be specific enough to be reliably identified in terms of the activities in which the children were engaged, so in the example of *writing*, some kind of overt indication that the child was *writing* would have to be involved, for example writing a letter to her mother. Holding a brush or colouring in a picture in a book would not be recorded as *writing* though we realise that such activities afford the child opportunities for exercising the appropriate muscles and hand-eye co-ordination which are necessary pre-writing skills.

The operational definitions used for the observation categories are given in Appendix 3.2 'Operational definitions and associated bands of experience in activities'.

Recording child observations

The child observation recording sheet (Appendix 3.3) allowed the observers to record the whole range of the tremendously rich early years activities in long hand format. However (in concordance with Research Question 1) pre-coding was deliberately focused on items relating to the 5–14 Guidelines. This means that the analysed observations do not relate to all the activities occurring during observations. Furthermore, it is recognised that the educational purpose of an activity may not always be transparent, i.e. observed, without intimate knowledge of a target child and the children with whom s/he may interact. In situations where it is not possible for the researcher to have instant access to a member of staff with the requisite knowledge of the individual children, it is necessary to judge from what the children do, not from what they might be thinking.

As many ***content*** and ***process*** areas as could be distinguished in any two minute period were recorded by the observer. However, any one content or process area was only recorded once, irrespective of its duration, and therefore events recorded cannot be attributed to the whole (2 minute) time period or segment. The piloting of the observation schedule (described in next section) suggested that the majority of cases (2 minute segments) could be described using a relatively small number of codes, and after the fieldwork was completed, it was indeed found that no more than 2 *content* area codes and up to 4 *process* area codes were required to describe all segments.

The aspects of the ***social context*** recorded were:

- the number of children involved in the target child's activity; and
- the number of adults involved in or supervising the activity.

However, it was not always easy to count the number of children engaged in a given activity, particularly in larger groups, and the following categories were therefore used in these cases: Child alone; child as part of a pair; child as part of a small group, ie 2 to 4 other children; child as part of a large group, ie 5 or more other children, but less than the whole class; and child as part of the whole class.

When adults were directly involved in or supervising the activity, their numbers were also recorded.

The ***involvement level*** was recorded by reference to a 5 point scale based on the 'Leuven Involvement Scale' developed by Ferré Laevers (1991). The scale is used for rating the child's mental and physical involvement with or in an activity. It ranges from 1 - 'daydreaming and no progress', to 5 - 'intense activity and concentration'. The major (behavioural) signs the rater uses in determining the level of involvement in a given case include:

- task progress,
- signs of perseverance, ie child returning to task when interrupted, and
- non verbal communication, eg body posture and muscle tone.

For a more detailed description of the involvement scale see Laevers (ibid.).

In a small number of cases it was not possible to describe the social context or involvement. This was due to a variety of factors, but mostly due to circumstances such as the children going to the toilet.

Procedure for child observations

Systematic observation as a record of behaviour can be either continuous or non-continuous, ie with planned intervals. Continuous observation often takes the form of writing down specified behaviour and recording 'episodes' which are chains of actions that form an independent or coherent part of the whole session. It is the necessity for taking time off from the observation that might be one source of observer bias since people vary in the time that they use for note taking and when they decide to do it. In response to this criticism, researchers may prefer to use some form of non-continuous observation with different types described in Croll (1986) and Boehm and Weinberg (1987).

The length of the interval recording segments that were decided on was 2 minutes. This is quite a long time for this kind of interval recording, but due to the high inference categories that we were operating with, and the busy atmosphere of the pre five environment, our experience from other observation studies, especially one carried out as

part of the Science Process Observation project (Cavendish et al. 1990), suggested that 2 minutes would be the right length of time. As a result observation procedures in each centre were devised combining two elements, the observation of 6 'target' and 2 'interval' children over two rounds, as follows:

Round 1

- The observation of 6 'target' children, each for a first round of 6 minutes, during which one record was made for each two minute time segment; the observations of the target children are referred to as target child/ren (TC) observations. (After a round of observations it was subsequently discovered that one of the target child observations was of a child with a special need in language.)

- The observation of the first of 2 children 'tracked' over a longer period by making a 2 minute observation of the chosen child/ren in the intervals between two target child observations; the observations extended over the 6 intervals between target children, and are thus referred to as observations of interval child/ren (IC).

In centres that were attended by children with special needs (SN), these children would, as far as possible, be included in the interval child observations as the extended period of the interval child observations was more suited in such cases. Where an observation was of a child with special needs it may be referred to as SN.

Round 2

- Round two consisted of the observation of the same 6 target children, carried out in the same way as in the first round, with each target child observation followed by a 2 minute observation of the second of the interval children, who may or may not be a child with special needs.

The method allowed the same number of observations (6 x 2 minutes) to be made of both target (TC) and interval children (IC or SN), only differing in their time frame, shown in Figure 3.1. Thus every child was observed for a period of 12 minutes.

Figure 3.1: *Time line for child activity observations*

Round 1												
Time (mins)	1 - 6	7	8 - 9	10	11 - 16	17	18 - 19	20	21 - 26	27	28 - 29	30
Focus	TC - 1		IC - A		TC - 2		IC - A		TC - 3		IC - A	
Time	31 - 36	37	38 - 39	40	41 - 46	47	48 - 49	50	51 - 56	57	58 - 59	60
Focus	TC - 4		IC - A		TC - 5		IC - A		TC - 6		IC - A	
Round 2												
Time	61 - 66	67	68 - 69	70	71 - 76	77	78 - 79	80	81 - 86	87	88 - 89	etc.
Focus	TC - 1		IC - B		TC - 2		IC - B		TC - 3		IC - B	etc.

Note that one minute was allowed between children, in order to locate the next one and to give time to prepare the record. The two rounds of observations thus took exactly 2

hours, and generally occupied a whole morning session. (Morning visits were made to all centres in order to keep this variable constant.)

Piloting and observers

Trials of the observation instrument were carried out in a children's centre not taking part in the study. Use of video-taped material, made at an earlier stage of the project, was helpful in fine-tuning instruments and training the observers. It was through these trials that we arrived at the procedures adopted, the number of categories needed and the definition of the categories.

The two observers were both male researchers experienced in observation techniques, neither of whom had playleader or teacher training. Both had considerable experience of working with children under the age of 5 years.

Visits were arranged in advance with the centres to avoid the most atypical days and to minimise disruption.

Sample for child observations

The number of observed children totalled 127, including 96 Target Children (TC) and 31 Interval Children, 6 of whom were deemed to have special needs (called IC and SN children respectively, see also Procedure, 'Round 1'). Children were aged 2-6 years, with the one 6 year old being a P1 child playing in a centre where the nursery was integrated with the P1 class. There was a roughly equal distribution between the sexes with 60 girls and 67 boys in the sample. If there was more than one (separate) playroom in the centre, one room would be chosen in consultation with the staff, usually to include children of the appropriate age.

The children were then chosen at random from the children in the selected playroom before the observations started, ensuring a balance between the sexes where possible, and including, when appropriate, up to two children with 'special needs', defined in a broad sense, in the interval observations. An independent assessment of such needs was not carried out; instead the researchers relied on the staff members' assessments and informal observations for the identification of such children.

Total data collected in child observations

At the end of the data collection period the body of data encompassed 127 children 96 'target' children, 23 children who were tracked in the intervals and 8 children with special needs who were observed using the same procedure as the tracked children. A total of 762 time segments of 2 minutes duration were observed, giving a total of 25.5 hours of observation.

Method of analysis of child observations

As mentioned earlier, each of the categories in the contents and process areas were initially derived from the first level of the 5–14, and taken on their own they form a somewhat fragmented picture of the kinds of experiences that the children might have had.

In line with the original purpose of illuminating the experiences that might provide continuity in children's lives as they move into the initial stages of compulsory education, it was thought appropriate to band the content and process areas of the children's activities into more general, or broader areas of experience equivalent to the curricular areas of the

5–14. Such an exercise would also have the advantage of allowing easier comparisons with the curricular areas of the 5–14 and other aspects of the observation data.

To this end four experts in early years education were asked to allocate each of the content and process categories as used in this project (Appendix 3.2) to the five curricular areas of the 5-14 (listed above). However, the experts found the task impossible and questioned the validity of such an exercise based on the meagre background information supplied. This avenue therefore had to be abandoned and we present instead a list and ranking of the four most often observed, or 'popular' content and process areas, as reported in Chapter 7, 'Pre-fives in Action'.

Reflections on the method used for child observations

The schedule worked well, in the sense that it was easy to fill in and extract the information for analysis. In the analysis stage, the allocation of observation segments to curricular areas was found impossible and abandoned.

With the benefit of hindsight, it seems that a number of factors impeded the analysis of curricular areas. The content areas and process areas overlapped too often, eg content: living things (1) and process: caring for living things (b). Within each scale there were inconsistencies, eg some categories contained concrete materials while others were based on constructs requiring very different degrees of inference, eg wheeled toys and rule and position based games in the content areas. At the same time the process areas were too numerous and did not reflect the different curricular areas in equal degrees, and were thus not amenable to a comparison across curricular areas.

Having said that, the idea of having observations based on discretely defined concrete or behavioural material was an advantage that afforded a high degree of reliability. Breaking down the observations into separate content and process areas helped in this. However, to allow a higher degree of certainty in the allocation of observation segments to areas the focus should probably have been on the *context*, in a curricular or learning sense, which we omitted. Because we focused on overt behaviour, having little background knowledge of the children, it is very difficult to say with certainty that a particular experience of a child falls within any single curricular area of the curriculum.

It should also be mentioned that during the planning of the target child observations we considered using radio microphones, but because of the logistic complications (eg of obtaining permission for their use) and problems with interference we had reservations. In addition the analysis of the recordings would have taken more time than we could afford and the idea was dropped. In hindsight, the target child observation data and its analysis would have been considerably enhanced by such recordings as it often proved difficult for observers to get close enough to hear the children's conversations. The amount of data we lost testifies to the difficulty that we have in measuring, if not understanding, the children's holistic learning, and it is likely that this particular finding is of some importance because it makes us rethink the relevance of dividing up the children's activities for other than purely teaching purposes (the staff teaching experience) which, it would appear, are totally divorced from the children's learning experiences.

In summary, there were too many situations where it was difficult, or impossible, to code activities or behaviour which meant that we 'lost' some of the richness of the real life situation which perhaps could be captured in the 'universal' nature of Kathy Sylva's Oxford observation schedule. It should be remembered, however, that the instrument was

deliberately biased more towards the 5–14 than the early years curriculum for the purposes of addressing Research Question 1. This bias existed in order to assess the continuity between pre-school services and school itself, and may be said to show the power relationship between the two. Had they been equal, the logical, not to say the natural, progression of children's learning and development would dictate the imposition of an early years perspective over subsequent schooling.

2d Observations and discussions with staff

Introduction

It was felt that observations of staff working and interacting with children, followed by discussions with the staff involved, would provide valuable insights focused on providers' aims and roles in relation to specific observed activities. For example, issues relating to quality, including the quality of social interaction in pre-five centres and providers' perceptions as to what constitutes good quality child care generally, could be explored in line with Research Question 8. This method could also provide illustrative material as to whether and how certain aspects of the child's pre-school experience are intended to help the child prepare for school as in Research Question 1, and highlight practical examples of activities felt to contribute to various aspects of child development, and yield examples of providers in action in relation to children with special needs as mentioned in Research Questions 2 and 4 respectively. Findings are reported in Chapter 8.

The learning environment in the early years is a holistic one, and engagement in a given activity may be intended to have a variety of possible learning outcomes. Because a great deal of the meaningfulness of such a situation can be missed by an observer unaware of staff' intentions and underlying knowledge, this exercise comprised both recording of observed activities and discussions with staff regarding the nature of what had been observed.

This exercise was similar to the photograph-based interviews conducted with staff and parents (described above) in that both were discursive exercises producing qualitative information and exploring subjective opinions. However, the staff observation and discussions were intended to focus on practice and intentions in relation to specific activities, investigating the nuts and bolts of working and interacting with children from the providers' view, while the earlier exercise was primarily concerned with perceptions of quality in relation to the generality of children's experiences in the centres concerned and with the overall aims of the provision.

Procedure

Each study centre had been informed of our intention to observe two members of staff carrying out their normal activities and to talk to them afterwards. Separate observations and discussions were carried out in respect of each members of staff. It was not always possible to interview two members of staff, particularly in the case of playgroups, where the playleader might be the only member of staff present. As a result, observations and discussions were carried out in respect of 28 members of staff.

It had been hoped to take into account any differences in opinion or approach between staff groups. To this end, where teacher trained staff were on duty with the children we asked that one of these staff participate. However, as such staff tend to predominate amongst heads of centres, who may not work directly with the children, this resulted in

only three teachers being included, which is an insufficient number on which to base an investigation of differences between staff groups.

Immediately prior to the observation period the researcher recorded aspects of the environment which provided a context for the interactions subsequently observed, including the number of adults and children present, the area of the room which the target adult was in, and the nature of the activity underway at the start of the observation. Although it had been hoped that this 'settling in' period, although short, might be useful in familiarising the children with the researcher, there were a few occasions where the presence of the researcher was said to have had an influence on children or staff (see 'Reflections on method' below).

Observations were conducted over a twenty minute period. This comprised five two minute observation periods each of which were followed by two minutes of recording time. Interactions between the relevant member of staff and the children were recorded, including staff location and actions, the number of children they were interacting with, and the nature of the language used. The adult observation sheet used is shown in Appendix 3.4.

Immediately after the recording period, the researcher spent a short time reading over the notes in order to assess the main points to be used as a basis for discussion. These discussions took place as soon as possible after the observation period and were located in a reasonably private area where possible. Since the observations were conducted over a fairly short period and the interview usually held immediately afterwards, the recollections of staff about the observation period were likely to be fairly good. The discussions were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Each discussion started with the researcher recounting the main features of the preceding activities as he had observed them, after which the member of staff was asked whether or not this represented a fair description of the observation period. This served the dual purpose of reminding the member of staff about the exact period under scrutiny, thus establishing a mutual ground for discussion, and allowing staff to reflect and comment on the researcher's description of events. This was followed by an introductory question - "Was there anything in particular that pleased you during the observed period?" - which was intended primarily to start the discussion in a non-threatening way which also gave the respondent complete freedom of choice as to which aspects of the observation period to mention.

The central questions then raised for discussion were as follows:

- What was the purpose of your activities during the period of observation?
- How are the children benefiting from your actions, or from your declining to act in certain situations?
- What might the children have learnt as a consequence of your actions and inactions?
- On what basis might you treat different children differently?

As these were essentially discussions rather than interviews, the researcher's input was fairly flexible, with the aim being to ensure that the above questions were addressed and the relevant aspects of the activities and interactions explored. The discussion period concluded with the researcher enquiring whether there were any other comments which the respondent wished to make.

Analysis of staff observations and discussions

The starting point for analysis were the transcripts of the discussions with staff regarding the observation period, as described above. Colour-coded highlighting was used to identify statements relevant to the central issues on which the discussions were focused (as set out in the four questions above), as well as other relevant areas such as the nature of the activities being undertaken by the children during the observation period. Comments on the various issues were drawn together on separate sheets, by noting the relevant transcript and page. This procedure allowed the major points emerging to be analysed and reported in a systematic fashion.

Reflections on the method used for staff observations and discussions

As with the staff interviews based on photographs, participation in this exercise required some organisation on the part of the study centres since cover had to be supplied for the participating staff during interview. Given that there was less flexibility as to when these interviews took place, as they had to follow on from a period of observed activities with the children, arranging cover could be difficult, particularly in the case of playgroups. On some occasions the only playleader on duty had to be interviewed in the playroom in order for her to be able to keep watch over the children at the same time. Clearly these are far from satisfactory interview conditions, and the resulting material from playgroups is relatively 'thin' in consequence.

The influence of the researcher on the nature of the activities taking place and the children's behaviour while participating in these activities was mentioned by staff on a few occasions. For example, a nursery nurse at a day nursery said that the language she had used during the observation period was more directive than usual, in order to 'come up with something more solid than activities sometimes are with under three year olds' in terms of the outcome of the activities underway during the observation period. And staff in a private nursery felt that the children had been 'showing off' to the researcher.

However it was felt that, on balance, this method had worked well in terms of its objectives: exploring providers' aims and roles in the context of the observed activities, thus illuminating some aspects of the craft of childcare and education. Furthermore, as well as information on the role of staff and the nature of staff interaction with children, this exercise yielded a great deal of information relevant to the children's own activities and what these were intended to achieve, which has been used to explore the nature and purpose of the activities undertaken by children as well as staff. Indeed, analysis of the interaction between children and staff would perhaps have been impossible without making reference to the nature and purpose of the specific activities in which the children were engaging: certainly this would have implied something of a contextual vacuum.

2e Interviews with centre leaders

Leaders of the sixteen centres which were studied in depth were interviewed using a semi structured interview schedule. This contained three areas: one relating to the completion of the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS), and the other two about their provision for children with special needs and for arrangements on quality assurance, the main points of Research Questions 4 and 8.

The aim of the interviews were to:

- clarify points in the environment rating scale that needed elaboration;
- establish the nature of procedures for identifying children with special needs and any follow-up measures;
- establish the nature of quality assurance measures in the centre.

The one to one semi-structured interviews were carried out by two of the three field researchers during the second visit to the study centres, after the researcher had finished the rating. Notes were taken by the researcher during the interviews and written up immediately afterwards. The transcribed interview notes were then analysed by a third researcher.

There were six broad topics, four related to the provisions and procedures for children with special needs and two for quality assurance - one on inspections and the other on steps taken to ensure the quality of provision.

Usually the head of the centre was interviewed but sometimes a depute. The informants were: five headteachers and one depute headteacher; four officers in charge and one depute officer in charge; four playleaders and the senior partner of a private nursery. The officers in charge were not qualified teachers but either nursery nurses or social workers.

The views emerging from these interviews are reported in Chapter 9, 'Ensuring Quality'. The issues concerned are salient to Chapters 12 and 13 concerned with the themes of 'Special Needs' and 'Quality'.

3 Regional arrangements for quality assurance

3a Interviews with Regional officers

Senior officers in each Region were very helpful in discussing their authority's position with respect to quality assurance in services under four broad topics relevant to the project:

- special characteristics of quality assurance designed for pre-fives
- formal structures and procedures for quality assurance
- extent to which these had been implemented
- issues arising from quality assurance activities to date

These were points relevant primarily to Research Question 8, which is concerned with the ways in which authorities monitor and assess quality, although some of the discussions turned out to be pertinent to other research questions also. In particular, comments concerning children with special needs were relevant to Research Question 4.

Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and a hour and a half, all conducted by the same interviewer who took notes of the discussion and returned her account to informants (7 in all) for confirmation and amendment. The four bullet points above were the initial trigger points for the discussion.

As there were only seven interviews for analysis it was fairly easy to identify the key points emerging across the interviews and the findings are set out in Chapter 9, 'Ensuring Quality'.

This approach was a very rich source of information, largely because the senior officers were very knowledgeable about both their own regions and about the issues involved. It was also appropriate to have interviewed them at the end of the project when we were familiar with much of the evidence emerging from other sources.

3b Analyses of Regional reviews

The Children Act 1989 (Section 19, Part 3) requires local authority social work and education departments to review the level, pattern and range of day care and related services for children under the age of eight in their areas. These reviews should be carried out in consultation with health boards, voluntary organisations, employer interests, parents and other interested bodies and individuals, and elected members should be involved in the process.

The project had access to the first round of review reports (authorities must carry out the next review within three years). These were used as a source of information on policy in the three Regions and to gain insights into quality assurance in practice.

■ Summary

A lot of information was collected in this exercise and most interested parties were consulted. However the voluntary sector, while not completely neglected, could have been consulted more thoroughly by instituting a programme of discussions with relevant bodies as a counterpart to the interviews held with Regional officials.

An area in which the methodology could have been better relates to the collection of data on the children's activities. While the observation schedule functioned well in terms of collecting evidence relevant to relating experiences overtly and demonstrably related to 5—14, it has to be said that the instrument was not sensitive to the full early years curriculum. It was not capable of successfully spanning the gap between the 5—14 and the early years curriculum. This could be due to a number of factors, one of which has to be the difficulty that exists for researchers observing children and adults about whom they know very little in highly complex situations. Tizard and Hughes also recognised this difficulty.

"... matching the level of explanation and information given to a child to her present level of understanding is a delicate process, which to be successful requires a close knowledge of the individual child." (Tizard and Hughes 1984: p262)

Although they describe the difficulties that staff have, the same is true about observing in general, and observing children interacting with adults in particular.

With this proviso, the methodology adopted was appropriate and the research instruments proved adequate to attract sufficient relevant evidence of Scottish provision for children under five.

Part Two — Findings

Part Two presents the findings arising from the various methods used to collect evidence.

Chapter 4 — What is on Offer for Pre-fives – providers' survey – sets out the results of a survey of various pre-five providers (including childminders).

Chapter 5 – Where Children and Staff Work – uses the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale to describe the facilities available for pre-fives.

Chapter 6 – Considerations of Quality – through interviews with staff and parents.

Chapter 7 – Pre-fives in Action – observations of young children in 16 centres.

Chapter 8 – Providers in Action – observations of practice and discussions with staff.

Chapter 9 – Ensuring Quality for Children with Special Needs – interviews with centre leaders and Regional Officers as well as analyses of Regional reviews.

4 What is on Offer for Pre-fives

Providers' Survey

Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings of a questionnaire survey which aimed to obtain a profile of current provision through comparative data on a range of providers. Because of variations between provision types, three different questionnaires were required, copies of which are available on request. The questionnaires were constructed in such a fashion as to allow for maximum comparability. The resulting information is a mix of factual data and providers' subjective assessments. Findings have been categorised by provision type, as shown below. Bracketed figures indicate the number of responding centres. Details of sampling, response rates, and the nature of these categories as well as other aspects of the survey method are provided in Chapter 3.

Nursery Schools and Classes (67)

Day Nurseries, Family Centres and Community Nurseries (46)

Private (30) and Partnership Nurseries (1)

Playgroups (159)

Childminders (186)

For ease of reference, nursery schools and classes will be referred to as 'nursery schools'; and day nurseries, family centres, and community nurseries will be referred to collectively as 'day nurseries'. Partnership nurseries are a new initiative and few exist. Although all were sampled, only one responded to the survey within the required timescale and, rather than report separately on this centre, the relevant findings have been grouped with those from private nurseries in a category referred to as 'private nurseries' for ease of reference. (However, two partnership nurseries were among the centres selected for in-depth study using a range of research methods, findings on which are reported separately in respect of partnership nurseries.)

Findings are discussed under headings relating to the various research questions. However, it is in the nature of the material presented that much of the information is relevant to more than one research question. For example, while data referring to children who have special needs is presented under Research Question 4 (concerning the provision made for children with special needs), some of this material is also relevant to research question two (concerning the balance between educational and social provision). The survey contributes to addressing six of the eight research questions: Questions 6 (on costs/ benefits) and 7 (on monitoring and assessing quality) have been addressed by other methods.

Because the aim of the survey was to draw out comparative data on the various categories of provision covered, findings required for the most part to be expressed as percentages. These are based on the total number of responding centres in the above categories, unless otherwise indicated. However, it should be noted that because provision types exist in varying numbers, these percentages are based on larger numbers of some

provision types than others. This has a bearing on margins of error in the reported figures. For example, the recording of a few erroneous responses from childminders (sampled at one in ten, yielding 185 responses) would be less likely to make an impact in percentage terms than would the recording of a few erroneous responses from day nurseries (all sampled, yielding 46 responses).

Most tables showing data are contained in the appendices, with a few key tables appearing in the text.

■ Pre-five provision and formal schooling

How do pre-school experiences outside the home relate to children's experiences during the first stages of formal schooling? To what extent in practice does pre-five provision facilitate coherence in children's learning from the first phases of learning outside the home and the initial stages of formal education, as indicated in the 5-14 Development Programme?

Several elements of the survey questionnaire have a bearing on this question. Presented below are findings in respect of the following: availability of physical resources (facilities, and toys and equipment), trips and visits undertaken, practices in respect of record keeping, and liaison with primary schools, relevant associations, and other professionals (such as social workers and health visitors). Liaison with physiotherapists, speech therapists, and psychological services is reported under Research Question 4.

Also of relevance to this question are perceptions as to the importance of the provision's role in preparation for school. This was among the service aims which providers were asked to rate (Research Question 2) and also emerged in response to open questions on benefits to children (Research Question 3) and elements of quality (Research Question 8).

Physical resources

Informants were provided with a list of facilities and a list of toys and equipment, and asked to indicate those available to children attending. (Facilities available to parents are reported under Research Question 5.) Such facilities and resources contribute to coherence in children's learning and development, both in relation to the formal education system and wider social development. The resulting information allows comparisons to be made between the various types of provision as to general resourcing.

Facilities

Table 4.1 in the appendices shows the proportion of providers indicating the availability of nine facilities such as cooking facilities, child sized toilets, and child sized tables and chairs. The data suggests that children attending the different types of provision are generally likely to find themselves with access to suitable facilities.

Day nurseries tended to be better provided with such facilities than were other forms of provision. All nine were reported to be available by over half of the day nurseries, the lowest proportion occurring in the case of bath facilities (52%).

Providing home based childcare means that childminders can make their own domestic facilities available to children they mind. Hence childminders score highly on availability of cooking facilities, sleeping/rest areas and washing machines. On the other hand, they

were least well resourced with purpose built items such as child-sized tables, chairs, and toilets. Only 43% reported having a cloakroom, but given the home based nature of the provision it is to be expected that most if not all of the others nonetheless had a coat hanging facility. Clearly some childminders did not mention facilities which in fact were present in their homes (19% reported no to the availability of nappy changing facilities and 10% said no to rest/sleeping area). This may have arisen because such facilities were not generally required by the children placed.

Private nurseries were also generally well provided with the listed facilities, although only one third (32%) reported the availability of baths and 45% the availability of nappy changing facilities.

A low proportion of nursery schools had bath facilities (10%) and nappy changing facilities (15%) and rest/sleeping areas (18%). These findings reflect the relatively older age of the children attending, as well as the greater likelihood of children attending nursery schools on a part-time basis (see Table 4.6).

Playgroups have the most difficulty in providing the kinds of facilities listed. Fewer than ten per cent reported availability of bath facilities, rest/sleeping areas, and washing machines, and only 13% reported having nappy changing facilities, while the availability of cooking facilities was lower than for any other provider, at 67%. Only three other facilities (hand washing facilities, child sized tables/chairs, and cloakroom) were available in over half of the playgroups. These findings partly reflect the type of premises in which playgroups are held, which tend to be multi-use venues not specifically designed for childcare provision. Playgroups are also catering predominantly for three and four year olds (see Table 4.3b), for whom some of the facilities listed are less likely to be required.

Toys and equipment

Providers supplied information about the toys and equipment available to children in their care, by indicating from a list of twenty-three items those which they provided or had access to. (It should be noted that this information gives an indication of availability and does not show how, if at all, these resources were used.) Responses are shown in detail in appendix Table 4.2, which gives the proportion of the various categories of provider reporting the availability of each of the listed items. The following summary table allows general comparisons between providers by showing how many of the 23 items were reported by (a) at least three-quarters of providers and (b) half of providers or less.

Table 4.1 *Summary of toys and equipment available in different kinds of provision*

No. of types of toys and equipment (from list of 23) available in:	Nursery schools	Day nurseries	Private nurseries	Playgroups	Childminders
Over three-quarters of centres	21	19	18	16	11
Half of centres or less	1	1	3	7	8
No. of responding centres	67	46	31	159	185

Nursery schools and day nurseries generally had a wider range of toys and equipment than had other forms of provision. Among both, only one of the types of toys and equipment listed was reported by less than half of the responding centres. In the case of nursery

schools this was a soft play area (33%), while 46% of day nurseries reported having a computer.

Private nurseries were also generally well resourced with toys and equipment. Of the twenty three types of toys and equipment listed, only three were found in less than half of the private nurseries. These were work benches (42%), wood working tools (29%) and computers (13%).

Playgroups tended to be fairly well resourced in respect of most items on the list, with sixteen of the twenty three listed items available in at least three quarters of responding playgroups, although the remaining seven were available in half or less. In particular, playgroups tended to be poorly provided with computers (4%), soft play areas (16%) and televisions (19%) – the types of equipment which are both expensive and difficult to leave in premises shared with other occupants.

Childminders are home based and the toys and equipment which they reported having reflect this. Fourteen of the twenty three listed items were reported less frequently by childminders than by any of the group providers, with childminders particularly unlikely to report having a work bench (18%), soft play area (30%) or measuring instruments (32%) available for children. (It is possible, however, that some childminders were unaware of what is meant by a soft play area and yet had a carpeted, comfortable area available for children to play in.) On the other hand, televisions, outdoor play areas, and reading books were reported more frequently among childminders than by any other form of provision.

It is interesting to note that in response to an open question on perceived relative disadvantages of the various forms of provision (see appendix Table 4.13), lack of resources was the most common response from both playgroups (11%) and childminders (10%).

Trips and visits

Informants were asked whether they took children on regular trips and visits, and those who said that they did were asked an open question as to what form these took. Trips and visits can be seen as familiarising children with the wider community and promoting coherence of experience.

The vast majority of nursery schools (91%) and day nurseries (91%) reported organising trips and visits on a regular basis. The percentage for childminders was also high at 81%. In the case of playgroups, almost three quarters (74%) managed regular trips, and for private nurseries the proportion was just over half (55%).

Findings on the nature of trips and visits are shown in appendix Table 4.3. These were most commonly made to local facilities such as shops and parks, with the highest proportions occurring in respect of nursery schools and day nurseries (both 87%) and childminders (75%). The next most popular locations for visits were settings such as zoos, farms, museums, and galleries, with regular visits reported by almost three quarters of day nurseries, 70% of nursery schools, just over half of playgroups, and around a quarter of private nurseries and childminders.

Record keeping

The questionnaire asked informants about their record keeping procedures and the ways in which such records were used. It was felt that this could be important in facilitating

coherence in children's learning. Records were kept by almost all nursery schools (96%) and day nurseries (91%), as well as three quarters of playgroups (76%) and two-thirds of private nurseries and childminders (65% of each). However, local authorities were also likely to keep some form of record in respect of children whom they placed with childminders: 39% of childminders reported caring for such children.

Content of records

From responses to an open question regarding the content of records (see appendix Table 4.4) the most commonly held type of information regarded the children's health. Such information was held by a substantial proportion of nursery schools, day nurseries, and playgroups (73%, 70%, and 67%, respectively) and by around half of childminders and private providers (55% and 45%, respectively).

Information on children's general development was commonly held by the nursery schools (86% of all nursery schools) and day nurseries (65%), whereas only just over a third of private nurseries, 9% of childminders, and none of the playgroups mentioned recording this information.

The practice of keeping information on the children's dietary requirements was also relatively popular, being reported by between 53% of nursery schools and 30% of playgroups.

Nursery schools were more likely to keep notes on children's curricular progress than were other types of provision, although less than half did so (44%). Such notes were kept by one in five day nurseries and private nurseries, and by just 2% of playgroups. No childminders reported keeping notes relevant to curricular progress.

Although day nurseries were much more likely to keep records on family background than were other forms of provision, only 38% did so. Traditionally day nurseries have catered for greater proportions of children referred by social work, in which case the keeping of notes on home background and circumstances is likely to be seen as necessary for assessing a child's needs.

Access to records

Access to records was indicated in responses to an open question (see appendix Table 4.5). Around three quarters of nursery schools (72%) reported that they kept records to which primary schools had access. However, when later asked an open question about liaison with primary schools (reported below) only 22% of nursery schools mentioned passing on reports. This may mean that although access to records was available to primary schools, they tended not to take advantage of this, or that reports were seen by primary school staff without being physically passed on. It is also possible that some nursery schools did not record passing on records as a form of liaison in response to the open question, even though this took place. In any case, although other providers were also less likely to report passing on reports in response to the later question, the proportionate drop was greatest among nursery schools. Day nurseries were next most likely to keep records to which primary schools had access; however, only 18% reported that this was the case. Just four playgroups, three private nurseries, and one childminder reported that children's records were available to primary school staff.

Day nurseries were most likely to report allowing other professionals access to their records, at 44%.

The great majority of nursery schools (93%) and day nurseries (89%) reported that they kept records to which parents had access. However, it is notable that when group providers were presented with a list of forms of parental involvement and asked to indicate those which applied (see Table 4.7) only three quarters of nursery schools indicated parental access to information. Similarly, a lower proportion of private nurseries (45%) noted parental access to information in response to the later question than had noted it here (55%). On the other hand, 44% of playgroups later reported that parents had access to information held by the centre, as compared to just 27% recording parental access in response to this question. (Findings were consistent in respect of day nurseries, and childminders were not asked the later question). Fewer providers in all categories provided reports written specifically for parents (see appendix Table 4.26).

Liaison

Group providers were asked whether or not they undertook any liaison work with local primary schools, as it was felt that such liaison could be important in providing coherent experiences for children. Providers were also asked about their contact with relevant associations and with a range of professionals, as the ability to work with and utilise the skills and information of others can be useful in seeking to provide integrated learning experiences for children.

Liaison with local primary schools

All but two nursery schools (97%) reported that they undertook some form of liaison with local primary schools: it should be noted that nursery classes are normally located in and affiliated to primary schools, encouraging such liaison. Liaison with primary schools was also common in the case of day nurseries, being reported by around three quarters of such centres (72%). Lower levels of contact with primary schools were recorded by playgroups (45%) and private nurseries (36%). It should be noted that over 40% of the children attending the surveyed playgroups were four and five year olds, for whom such liaison is most appropriate (see Table 4.3b).

Those who said that they liaised with local primary schools were asked an open question as to the form this liaison took: responses are shown in appendix Table 4.6, with percentages based on all providers.

The three forms of contact most frequently specified were visits by children to primary schools, visits by pre-five staff to primary schools, and regular contacts between staff. Playgroups were exceptional in that school staff were more likely to visit the centre than *vice versa* : indeed, playgroups were the only type of pre-five provision which reported visits from primary school teachers. On the other hand, the incidence of staff from playgroups visiting primary schools was lower than for any other form of provision.

Although around half of nursery schools and day nurseries reported that children visited primary schools, a much smaller proportion (9% and 15%, respectively) specified that more formal induction sessions took place.

Liaison over curricular matters was reported by just seventeen centres in total from approximately three hundred surveyed. The proportion reporting such liaison was highest in the case of nursery schools, but even here amounted to just 12%.

Some providers mentioned providing schools with records relating to the children in response to this question. However, providers were less likely to specify passing on reports or information as a form of liaison than to note that primary schools had access to

records when asked about this. As noted above, this may mean that while access to records was available to primary schools, they tended not to take advantage of this; or that some providers did not see passing on records as a form of liaison; or that records were seen without being physically passed on - for example, pre-five staff who visited primary schools might carry records with them. In any case, just twenty two centres reported passing on reports or information as a form of liaison, the highest proportion occurring in the case of nursery schools, at 22%.

Asked whether or not liaison with primary schools had affected the work of the centre, around two-thirds of nursery schools and day nurseries which had such liaison (69% of each) reported that it had. Private nurseries and playgroups were much less likely to report this at 31% and 23% of centres which had liaison, respectively. Effects on centres' work tended to be described in terms of improving communication between the centre and the primary school, and helping integrate the work undertaken.

The great majority of all providers who liaised with primary schools felt that such contact benefited the children in that it prepared them for school, for example by providing continuity of experience and a degree of familiarity with what was to come. Not surprisingly in view of the above findings on records, fewer felt that such liaison helped children by familiarising the school with their individual needs. Only around a quarter of nursery schools and day nurseries reported that liaison which led to schools being aware of individual children's needs took place, while this was even less likely in the case of private nurseries (13%) and most unlikely among playgroups (1%).

Liaison with providers' associations

Providers were asked about any links with various umbrella associations by presenting a relevant list and asking them to indicate in respect of each (i) whether they received support for their work and (ii) whether they had some other form of contact. The results are presented in appendix Table 4.7

Most providers in the 'day nursery' category (57%) had no contact with the Scottish Association of Family Centres (SAFC), while around one third recorded support from SAFC, and 9% recorded some other form of contact. Presumably most of those which did have contact were family centres, as opposed to community nurseries or day nurseries. In addition, a few nursery schools and playgroups mentioned contact with SAFC.

Almost all playgroups (93%) had some form of contact with the Scottish Pre-school Playgroup Association (SPPA), although only around one third reported support in relation to the centre's work. Support from the SPPA was also reported by around a quarter of private nurseries and a by small proportion of day nurseries and nursery schools. In addition, around a quarter of all three reported some other form of contact with the SPPA. Although childminders were not asked specifically about contact with the SPPA, 5% of childminders reported such contact in response to an open question, reflecting the likelihood of childminders attending playgroups with the children they mind (see appendix Table 4.11).

Support from the Scottish Childminding Association (SCA) was specified by around a quarter of childminders, while over half (58%) reported that they had some other form of contact. Sixteen per cent said that they had no contact with the SCA. (Other providers were not asked this question)

Liaison with other professionals

As in the case of liaison with associations, providers were asked about any links professionals from outwith the centre by presenting a relevant list and asking them to indicate in respect of each (i) whether they received support for their work and (ii) whether they had some other form of contact. Results are presented in appendix Table 4.8.

Day nurseries and nursery schools were also more likely than other providers to record contact with health visitors, and it is not surprising that these providers, which are local authority services, also indicated the highest levels of contact and support from other staff employed by the local authority. The single exception was in relation to nursery schools' contact with pre-school community organisers (PSCO), whose functions include registering and inspecting voluntary groups, helping to secure training, resources for providers, and encouraging networking and support, as nursery schools were less likely than any other provider to report contact (at 54%). By contrast, other providers were in the main more likely to report contact with the PSCO than with any of the other professionals listed (day nurseries being equally likely to report contact with Educational Officers and Advisors), this suggests some reluctance on the part of nursery schools to call on their services.

The majority of nursery schools and day nurseries reported contact with health visitors and social workers. It is notable that all day nurseries which reported such liaison recorded it as supportive, while nursery schools were more likely simply to record their liaison as 'contact'. This could mean that the nature of the liaison varied between nursery schools and day nurseries, with more direct involvement of social workers and health visitors in the case of the latter. Or it could mean that contact of a given nature was unlikely to be perceived by nursery schools as supportive of their work, perhaps because they define their goals in more narrowly educational terms than do day nurseries.

Health visitors and educational officers and advisors were the professionals with whom nursery schools were most likely to record contact, at 95% in respect of both. Day nurseries were most likely to report contact with the latter and with the PSCO, at 98% in respect of both. Aside from contact with the PSCO (as discussed above), the professionals with whom private nurseries, playgroups, and childminders were most likely to have contact were health visitors (at 52%, 40%, and 43%, respectively).

■ Diverse needs of families

What is the balance between educational and social provision for children of different ages and how well is this matched to the diverse needs of families and communities from different rural and urban locations and their socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds?

Providers were asked about a diverse range of subjects in relation to this question. Reported below are findings on the following: aims of the provision, any priorities or conditions for admittance, and waiting lists; distances travelled to the centre, and whether parents were using more than one type of provision to meet their childcare requirements; arrangements for any child whose first language was not English or who required a special diet; and whether any of the staff were from an ethnic, cultural, or religious minority group. In addition, some of the findings reported on under Research Questions 4, 5, 7 and 8 are also relevant to this question. For example, information on charges and opening times is reported under Research Question 5.

Aims of the provision

Providers were presented with a list of eight possible aims of provision for pre school children and asked to rate them on a four point scale in terms of their importance to the aims of their own service. Four of the eight listed aims related to children, and four to parents. Responses to open questions on benefits to children (Table 4.4) and to parents (Table 4.7) as well as on elements of quality (Table 4.8) also touch on these aims: an attempt has been made to note relevant comparisons in the following discussion.

Not surprisingly, few providers allocated a 'less important' or 'hardly important' rating to the four child-related aims, the vast majority opting for 'important' or 'very important'. Relative assessments therefore hinge on these categories, and Table 4.2a} presents data indicating the proportions allocating a 'very important' rating.

Table 4.2a *Child-related service aims*

% rating as 'very important'	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Providing a high quality environment for the children	96	93	97	74	76
Providing the opportunity for children to mix	85	65	90	97	70
Helping to develop children's language	94	83	81	70	61
Helping prepare children for school	52	41	77	54	43
Number of responding centres	67	46	31	157	176

In the case of nursery schools, day nurseries, private nurseries. and childminders, the aim most commonly rated as 'very important' was 'providing a high quality environment for the children'. Among playgroups this was also rated highly, but 'providing the opportunity for children to mix' was the aim rated as 'very important' by the highest proportion of centres. This too was seen as a 'very important' aim by a majority of the other providers (ranging from 65% of day nurseries to 90% of private nurseries).

Substantial proportions of all providers (ranging from 61% of childminders to 94% of nursery schools) rated 'helping to develop children's language' as 'very important': greater proportions than allocated such a rating to 'helping prepare children for school'. However, far fewer referred to language development in response to an open question regarding perceived benefits to children and all but day nurseries were more likely to specify preparation for school than language development as a benefit (see Table 4.4).

The findings in respect of preparation for school are also surprising in that private nurseries were far more likely to rate this as 'very important' than were any other providers. Again, this is in contrast to responses to open questions - both on benefits to children arising from attendance (see Table 4.4), and on the main elements of good quality pre-five provision in general (see Table 4.9) - where preparation for school was mentioned most frequently by nursery schools.

Providers were also asked to note any further aims which they felt to be important to the centre. Around a quarter of nursery schools, day nurseries, and playgroups made reference to promoting child development in general terms, and a few nursery schools and

day nurseries specified the integration of children with special needs. Childminders were most likely to refer to the provision of a safe, caring, home-like environment.

Responses in relation to aims concerned with the needs of parents were more likely to range across the rating scale. Table 4.2b gives findings in respect of the two extremes of the four point scale, ie 'very important' and 'hardly important'.

Table 4.2b *Parent-related service aims*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
			% rating as 'very important'		
Allowing parents to train for or attend work	5	46	42	5	36
Allowing parents to return to education	6	43	32	5	36
Allowing parents respite from their children	11	41	14	13	7
Providing the opportunity for parents to socialise	16	41	6	17	5
			% rating as 'hardly important'		
Allowing parents to train for or attend work	32	7	16	42	2
Allowing parents to return to education	29	7	16	43	3
Allowing parents respite from their children	23	0	26	18	15
Providing the opportunity for parents to socialise	12	2	29	10	34
Number of responding centres	67	46	31	157	176

Greater differences among providers emerged in relation to aims which concerned meeting parental needs. For example, 41% of day nurseries rated 'allowing parents respite from their children' as 'very important'; a much higher proportion than for any other provider. No day nurseries saw this as 'hardly important', as compared to around a quarter of nursery schools and private nurseries.

In respect of 'allowing parents to train for, or attend, work', fairly similar percentages of day nurseries (46%), private nurseries (42%) and childminders (50%) rated this as 'very important', as compared to just 6% of nursery schools and 5% of playgroups. A very similar picture emerges in terms of 'allowing parents to return to education'. Findings on these two aims are broadly in line with providers' relative positions as expressed in response to an open question on advantages to parents (reported in Table 4.8). However, in response to an open question on the main elements of good quality pre-five provision in general (as reported in Table 4.9), nursery schools were the provision type most likely to specify the recognition of parental needs: 35% did so, a much higher proportion than rated any of the above listed aims relating to parents as 'very important' in terms of the aims of their service.

Conditions for admittance

Playgroups and nursery schools were the types of provision most likely to report setting basic entry conditions for children, at 87% and 86%, respectively. On the other hand, just 10% of childminders reported setting such conditions (although the local authorities might operate such a system in respect of the 39% of childminders who reported taking local authority sponsored children). Almost half of private nurseries (45%) and 22% of day nurseries reported setting basic conditions for entry.

Those who said that they did set basic entry conditions were asked an open question as to their nature. Responses were grouped into five specific categories and a residual 'other' group (see appendix Table 4.9).

Two-thirds of all nursery schools took only children of certain ages, and 21% specified that the children required to be in their pre-school year. A requirement for the children to be toilet trained was specified by 22% of nursery schools.

Among day nurseries, which were much less likely to set basic entry requirements than were nursery schools, the most frequently mentioned condition again related to the age of the child (reported by 20% of day nurseries), although none specifically stated that a child was required to be in his or her pre-school year.

Age of the child was also the most commonly mentioned condition on the part of private nurseries, being specified by 42%. Toilet training was specified by 20% of private nurseries.

Two-thirds of all playgroups set a minimum age requirement for children attending. Relatedly, over half of playgroups (56%) required the children attending to be toilet trained, which is not surprising as only 13% reported the availability of nappy changing facilities (see appendix Table 4.1). A substantial minority of playgroups (43%) specified some other type of entry condition.

Few childminders specified basic conditions of entry. Five specified that the children must speak English (presumably this applied only to children who were old enough to speak at all), and it might be expected that many of the others would also have insisted on this for practical reasons but perhaps did not think to mention it if a childcare situation had never arisen which would have required communication in a language other than English. Only one mentioned a condition of entry related to age. Twelve childminders mentioned some other condition of entry.

Priorities

The vast majority of nursery schools (94%) and day nurseries (98%) said that they gave priority for places to certain groups of children or families. On the other hand, only around one third of private nurseries, playgroups, and childminders reported operating a priority system. However, although 68% of childminders replied in the negative, the operation of a priority system in terms of access to places would be the province of the local authority in the case of the 39% of childminders who reported taking local authority sponsored children.

In reply to an open question on the nature of such priorities nursery schools and day nurseries most commonly responded that they followed the appropriate Regional guidelines: these are described in Chapter 10. Many went on to indicate some of the specifics of these guidelines. For nursery schools, the two most commonly reported specific priorities were

children with special needs and families referred by professionals such as GPs, Health Visitors, or Educational Psychologists. In respect of both of these circumstances, the proportion of nursery schools saying that children were given priority was one third. In the case of day nurseries, the two most commonly reported specific priorities were families referred by other individuals and agencies (37% of informants) and children 'at risk' (33% of informants).

The most commonly mentioned priority among private nurseries was children with special needs (13%), and, in the case of playgroups, referred families (12%).

Waiting lists

All but two day nurseries (96%) reported having a waiting list for entry, while in the case of nursery schools, playgroups and private nurseries around three quarters reported having a waiting list (76%, 72%, and 77%, respectively). Only 6% of childminders said that they had a waiting list, and 8% reported that they were not currently minding any children. This may indicate some spare capacity within the childminding service. However, it is possible that childminders simply do not tend to operate with waiting lists. Around half of the childminders (49%) reported that parents found out about their service via the local authority, and many of them minded local authority sponsored children. Local authorities therefore hold the key to the situation regarding supply and demand of childminder services.

Appendix Table 4.10 gives information on the waiting lists for full- and part-time places at nursery schools, day nurseries, and private nurseries, in terms of how they related to the centres' current rolls. (Comparable information is not available for playgroups or childminders). With the move in Strathclyde towards a locally based admissions panel, waiting lists for local authority provision in that Region - which accounts for most of the nursery schools surveyed and almost all of the day nurseries - are no longer centre-based. Nonetheless these statistics do give an indication of unmet demand, and will include children whose parents would wish immediate attendance and others whose names are placed on a waiting list in advance in the hope that a place will become available when required.

Almost 40% of all day nurseries had a waiting list for full-time places which at least equalled their current roll, including 25% of all day nurseries where the reported waiting list was at least double the current roll. Nursery schools were more likely to report substantial numbers waiting for part-time places, with 44% having a waiting list of less than the current roll and a further 27% a waiting list which equalled or exceeded this. Waiting lists for private nurseries appeared comparatively less substantial, but nonetheless indicate a considerable degree of unmet demand.

Ages of children attending

Providers were asked about the ages of the children who attended. Table 4.3b relates to nursery schools, day nurseries, and private nurseries, and shows the proportion of centres in which at least half of places were taken by children of various ages.

Table 4.3a *Ages catered for: nursery schools, day nurseries, and private nurseries*

Centres with half or more of places taken by children aged:	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %
up to Two years	2	9	23
Three years	6	10	32
Four years	83	45	30
Five years	9	12	7
Number of responding centres	63	42	30

Findings indicate that nursery schools were catering predominantly for four year olds. Taking this information together with that for five year olds implies that over 90% of nursery schools were predominantly catering for children in their pre-school year. Few nursery schools were catering for any children below the age of three. Although day nurseries also appear more likely to cater for children in their pre-school year than for younger children, they were more likely than nursery schools to have a predominance of two or three year olds (albeit this applied only to a small minority of centres). Private nurseries showed much greater variation in terms of the predominant ages of children, with similar findings in relation to three and four year olds, and around a quarter of centres catering predominantly for younger children.

Findings in respect of playgroups and childminders were processed in terms of the total number of children attending all of the surveyed providers, and are presented in Table 4.3b below.

Table 4.3b *Ages catered for: playgroups and childminders*

Attenders aged	Playgroup Attenders %	Childminder Attenders %
up to Two years	3	33
Three years	54	
Four years	36	25 (3-4 yrs)
Five years	7	42 (5+ yrs)
Total attenders	4721	542

Just over half of all children attending the surveyed playgroups were three years of age: very few were aged below three. (A sister service to playgroups for younger children exists in the form of mother and toddler groups which were not covered by this study.) On the other hand, one third of children cared for by the surveyed childminders were aged two years or less. Childminders differ from group providers in that they also care for older children, and a very substantial minority of the children cared for (42%) were aged five or over (it is not possible to say how many of the five year olds were not yet attending primary school). However, the great majority of minders (94%) reported looking after at least one child aged under five, and over a third (36%) were looking after pre-fives exclusively.

Travelling to pre-five provision

Providers were asked whether or not any of the children attending travelled a distance of over two miles. Private nurseries were much more likely than other providers to respond in the affirmative, at 94% . This suggests that the families of children attending private nurseries are more likely than those of children attending other forms of provision to have use of a car. The proportion was lowest in the case of childminders, with 30% reporting attendance by children travelling more than two miles. It is possible that the geographical spread of child minders is such that people generally do not have to travel any great distance to find one. Figures for nursery schools, playgroups, and day nurseries were 46%, 55% and 61%, respectively.

Families using more than one childcare service

Group providers were asked whether or not any of the children attending also attended some other pre-five provision. Across all types of provision more than half of the providers reported having children who also attended other pre-five groups, proportions ranging from just over half (54%) of nursery schools to three quarters in the case of playgroups. Since these findings arise from providers who are aware of families' use of other childcare facilities, they are probably an underestimate. Childminders were asked whether or not they took any of the children whom they minded to other pre-five groups, and a striking 70% reported that they did so.

Providers were also asked an open question as to what form of additional provision their children experienced. Responses are shown in appendix Table 4.11.

Half of the playgroups and around one third of nursery schools, day nurseries, and private nurseries said that they had children who also went to childminders; this was the most frequently reported form of alternative provision in the case of all but private nurseries, where the most common response (45%) was in respect of children also attending playgroups.

Most commonly childminders said that they used playgroups (41%), mother and toddler groups (36%), and nursery schools (23%), suggesting that a notable proportion of children placed with childminders also spend part of their time (often with the minder) in some form of group provision. In view of the fact that so many childminders used playgroups and mother and toddler groups, it is of little surprise that 89% of childminders who took children to other pre-five groups said that they helped out at these groups.

Asked for likely reasons as to why some children were attending more than one form of provision, the majority of responses - particularly from nursery schools and playgroups - were couched in terms of parental requirements, primarily the need for extended hours to accommodate parental work.

Children who require special diets

Providers were asked whether any of the children attending required a special diet. This requirement could arise from considerations of health, religion, or simple preference. Similar proportions of day nurseries, private nurseries, and nursery schools (46%, 42%, and 39%, respectively) reported the presence of children in their care requiring special food or diet. For playgroups and childminders the proportions were much less; 15% and 5% respectively. It is perhaps relevant to note that playgroups provide a sessional service

and as such would be unlikely to be required to serve meals, although this would not preclude the provision of snacks. Those who reported being required to provide special diets specified these as vegetarian/meat free, dairy free, or additive restricted.

The relevant providers were asked an open question as to what support, if any, was available to these children. Most said that they did not require support, or that the necessary support was available within existing resources. Parental support for nursery schools, playgroups, and childminders was specified in a small number of cases.

Children whose first language is not English

A total of 68 group providers (around one in five) and one childminder reported having the care of one or more child whose first language was not English (ESL). The proportions reporting such children among their attendees were highest in the case of nursery schools and day nurseries at 39% and 36% of centres, respectively. Among private nurseries and playgroups, proportions were much lower, at 14% and 11%, respectively. (This information does not reveal how many children in the centres fell into this category.) A range of first languages were reported (as shown in appendix Table 4.12) – most commonly Urdu, Punjabi, and Mandarin/Chinese.

Group providers were also asked about available support for these children, in an open question. Although twenty one centres (around one third of centres reporting ESL children) reported that some form of support was available, only three specified the availability of staff and another three the availability of other professionals who spoke the child's first language. One provider, a playgroup, mentioned parental support.

The childminder who reported having care of a child for whom English was a second language was able to speak the child's first language.

Staff from minority groups

As the presence of staff from minority groups can play an important part in addressing the needs of any children attending the centre who are from the same background, providers were asked whether any of their childcare staff were from an ethnic, cultural, or religious minority group. Only fourteen group providers in total (around 5%) responded in the affirmative, while three childminders replied that they were a member of a minority group. Among group providers, the highest proportion reporting staff from a minority group was 9%, in the case of both nursery schools and day nurseries.

The above figures on providers caring for children for whom English is a second language give an indication of the presence of children from minority groups and, taken together, findings suggest that many such children attend provision where none of the staff share their culture or first language.

Male staff

Male staff remain a very small minority: of over a thousand staff in the centres surveyed, less than twenty were male. Some children - including some of those raised in lone female households - lack positive experiences of male adults. The presence of males among centre staff can help redress this. Furthermore, the presence of such staff could encourage paternal involvement in pre-five centres.

Children's development

What contributions to children's development are claimed and how does practice match up to this?

The survey sought to produce information which would give an indication of the specific contributions which pre-five providers felt that attendance at their centre makes to children's development. This section presents an analysis of responses to questions asking about the perceived benefits to children resulting from attendance, and whether or not there were any associated disadvantages. Also relevant to this subject are providers' views on the major elements of quality pre-five provision in general (reported on under Research Question 8), and the rating exercise which they were asked to carry out with reference to the aims of their own centre (reported under Research Question 2).

Benefits for children

Providers were asked an open question as to what benefits they perceived as arising for children as a result of attendance at their provision. The responses were grouped into eight categories and a residual 'other' group and are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 *Benefits to children*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Socialising with other children	66	55	62	93	53
Having a safe and caring environment	32	61	55	15	33
Building self confidence	35	48	28	29	12
Preparation for school	43	11	24	25	6
Giving children new experiences	31	27	24	22	5
Developing children's language	28	32	17	18	2
Providing toys and equipment for children	6	23	28	26	4
Providing a curriculum suited to individual children's needs	20	32	10	17	0
Providing a homelike environment	0	0	0	0	51
Giving children respite from parents	3	5	0	9	3
Other	32	14	14	7	16
Number of responding centres	66	44	29	152	171

The four child-related service aims which providers were asked to rate (see Table 4.2a) also tended to emerge here. As one might expect, fewer providers independently identified these specific benefits in response to this open question than allocated a 'very important' rating when provided with a pre-determined list. However, such differences were particularly pronounced in relation to 'developing children's language', with a difference of over fifty percentage points in relation to all providers between the above findings and

the proportion recording a 'very important' rating in respect of this aim. For example, 94% of nursery schools rated this as 'very important', yet just 28% mentioned this as a benefit arising from attendance.

Benefits arising from the opportunity to socialise with other children were mentioned by over half of informants across all provision types, the proportion ranging from 53% in the case of childminders to 93% of playgroups. This was the most commonly reported benefit on the part of all of the group providers with the exception of day nurseries, where it came second to the provision of a safe and caring environment (61%).

The second most commonly mentioned benefit in the case of nursery schools was preparation for school (43%), while among the other providers, the proportion specifying this was substantially lower (in the case of childminders just 6%). There is some inconsistency in providers' relative positions on this issue in response to this question and the findings of the rating exercise reported above. Playgroups and private nurseries, particularly the latter, were more likely than nursery schools to rate 'helping prepare children for school' as 'very important' in terms of the aims of their service, yet were far less likely than nursery schools to report this as a benefit resulting from attendance.

Building self confidence in children was mentioned by a substantial minority of all group providers (ranging from 28% of private nurseries to 48% of day nurseries) as compared to just 12% of childminders. Other benefits specified included providing children with new experiences, and providing children with toys and equipment. Just over half (51%) of the childminders specified being able to provide a homelike environment as a benefit to the children in their care.

Disadvantages for children

Providers were also asked about any perceived disadvantages to children arising from attendance at their provision as compared to other forms of pre-five provision. Responses are detailed in appendix Table 4.13. A minority of providers in all categories felt that there could be disadvantages for children, proportions ranging from 33% in the case of day nurseries to 13% of private nursery provision.

In the case of nursery schools, the most commonly mentioned disadvantage was the part-time nature of the provision (specified by 12%). However, among playgroups, where children are even more likely to experience provision of a part-time nature, there was no mention of this as a disadvantage for the children. It is possible that in this respect the expectations of playgroup leaders responding to the survey were lower than those of nursery school teachers, who may have been more mindful of the full-time nature of school attendance; however, playgroups were also less likely than nursery schools to perceive the part-time nature of the provision as a disadvantage to parents (see appendix Table 4.30).

By contrast, in the case of day nurseries, the most commonly expressed response (11%) was that the day could be too long for some children. Given that day nurseries are more likely both to provide full day places for children and to take younger children than are either playgroups or nursery schools, this response is not unexpected.

Very few private nurseries (four centres) identified disadvantages for children attending their provision. Only one disadvantage was specified by two private nurseries; this was the perception of a poor mix of children attending in terms of class, race or sex, indicating a recognition that such homogeneity can give children a partial view of the society in

which they live. This was also mentioned by a few nursery schools, day nurseries, and playgroups.

In the case of playgroups and childminders the most common single response (11% and 10% respectively) related to a perceived lack of resources. Findings on physical resources are reported under Research Question 1 and would tend to bear this out.

Provision for children with special needs

What provision is made for children with special needs in relation to cognitive, physical and emotional aspects of development?

Providers were asked whether or not they cared for any children with physical difficulties, learning difficulties, or emotional difficulties. Those who did were asked about the nature of these difficulties and about any support available to them in relation to providing for these children. Further relevant information is reported under Research Questions 1, 2, and 8. For example, findings on liaison with health visitors are reported under Research Question 1 in view of the breadth of their remit, but it is to be expected that some of the contact reported would have related to support of children with special needs.

Children with special needs

When considering findings on this subject, it should be noted that the diagnosis of disabilities and other special needs, and even the ability to identify children with certain special needs at all, is likely to vary between centres. For example, the same presenting problem might well be categorised as a language difficulty in centres where manifested by only a few children, while other centres with higher numbers of such children would be more likely to view the same as a general delayed development problem, or even as normal. Factors such as staff' backgrounds and training, the socio-economic characteristics of the area in which the centre is located, and the ages of the children catered for might also influence whether problems are diagnosed and the nature of the diagnosis made. Of course many children with special needs, particularly those with severe difficulties and those whose needs arise from a clearly identifiable physical difficulty, will be placed in local authority provision on the basis of a pre-existing identification and diagnosis of need.

Table 4.5 reports the proportion of providers reporting caring for one or more children with special needs. It should be stressed that these figures do not indicate the proportion of children with special needs attending these centres.

Table 4.5 *Centres reporting one or more children with special needs*

Attenders including one or more children with the specified special need	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Physical difficulty	56	50	27	7	3
Learning difficulty	65	70	17	13	4
Emotional/behavioural difficulty	46	80	23	18	6

Children with physical difficulties

The proportions for nursery schools and for day nurseries with one or more children with physical difficulties were similar, with around half of such centres reporting this. In the case of private nurseries, around one quarter reported caring for one or more children with physical difficulties, while for playgroups and childminders the proportion dropped to less than one in ten.

Table 4.14 in the appendices indicates the kinds of physical disabilities which were reported. In terms of the comparison between centre types, the most striking finding relates to children with multiple physical disabilities. Half of the day nurseries reported having the care of at least one such child, as compared to just one nursery school, one childminder, and no playgroups or private nurseries. It is possible that Regional placement policy and parental choice feeds such children into day nurseries since they are more likely to be able to offer full-time placement

Those who reported having the care of children with a physical disability were also asked an open question as to what support was available to them in this regard. In addition, all providers had been asked about liaison with physiotherapists, and as this would be most relevant to centres caring for children with a physical difficulty responses to both questions are illustrated in appendix Table 4.15.

With the exception of a few nursery schools and childminders all informants agreed that some support was required, although a substantial minority of playgroups and (to a lesser extent) nursery schools referred to supporting these children from within their existing resources. In addition, the availability of extra staffing or resources for the care of children with a physical difficulty was specified by around two in ten of the relevant nursery schools and playgroups. Thus nursery schools and playgroups would appear more likely to offer support from within their staff complement and resources than day nurseries and private nurseries.

However, the most commonly cited support for these children on the part of nursery schools, day nurseries, and private nurseries was the assistance of relevant professionals from outwith the centre, including physiotherapists. It would appear that all day nurseries - and, indeed, all childminders - having the care of physically disabled children had some form of contact with a physiotherapist;, and three quarters of the relevant day nurseries would appear to have direct support. The number of nursery schools reporting contact with a physiotherapist represented two thirds of those caring for children with a physical difficulty. However, although four private nurseries (representing half of those which included children with a physical difficulty among their attenders) reported support from professionals from outwith the centre, only one referred to support from a physiotherapist. Only one playgroup reported contact with a physiotherapist, and none had direct physiotherapy support. However, four playgroups, representing half of those caring for one or more children with a physical disability, received some form of professional support from outwith the centre.

Children with learning difficulties

Once again the picture for nursery schools is similar to that for day nurseries, with around two thirds of such centres reporting the presence of one or more children with learning difficulties. For playgroups and private nurseries the proportion is substantially lower, and only 4% of childminders reported caring for a child with a learning difficulty.

Language problems were the kinds of learning difficulties most commonly reported by nursery schools (see appendix Table 4.16): one third reported language difficulties, as compared to 15% of day nurseries. On the other hand, day nurseries were more likely to report children with general delayed development than were nursery schools. All groups reported speech problems within learning difficulties and it should be noted that the services of speech therapists (as reported below) are particularly relevant to such children.

Turning to support for these children (see appendix Table 4.17), by far the most common response among group providers was the use of professional support from outwith the centre. Local authority services, day nurseries and nursery schools can be expected to have relatively easy access to other professionals employed by the local authority, and may even have routine procedures for contacting them. Private nurseries and playgroups could not be expected to draw on local authority support in the same way. Most of the seven childminders who reported having the care of one or more children with a learning difficulty supported these children from within their own resources.

Children with emotional and behavioural difficulties

Among day nurseries, 80% reported having the care of one or more children with emotional or behavioural difficulties, a much higher proportion than for other provision types. As day nurseries are more likely to care for children deemed to be 'at risk' and children from families in crisis these findings are to be expected.

Hyperactivity was the most commonly reported difficulty by all providers (see appendix Table 4.18. The major differences between nursery schools and day nurseries emerged in relation to children with aggressive behaviour and children with general emotional problems: in both instances, substantially higher percentages of day nurseries reported having the care of at least one such child.

Asked what support was available to them (see appendix Table 4.19) almost all of those who reported having the care of one or more children with an emotional difficulty agreed that some support was required. Again, substantial proportions reported the assistance of professionals from outwith the centre in supporting these children. A small proportion of the relevant nursery schools, day nurseries, and childminders mentioned the use of parental support. Findings on liaison with staff employed by the Regional psychological services, reported below, are particularly relevant in respect of these children.

Liaison with relevant professionals

Providers were asked whether or not they had contact with or received support from speech therapists or psychologists. Findings are reported in this section as such staff clearly have a bearing on supporting children with special needs. Speech therapists respond to developmental delay related to speech and language, while psychologists have a role in relation to children with emotional or behavioural difficulties. However, both have a wider remit. Speech therapists can play a part in encouraging children to attend and listen; psychologists have a broad role in local authority service organisation and delivery, and often chair Pre-school Community Assessment Teams (PRESCAT). In the light of such ranges of potential involvement, findings on liaison with these services, as presented in appendix Table 4.20, are expressed as a percentage of all providers.

Over 90% of nursery schools and day nurseries liaised with staff from the Regional psychological service, with three quarters receiving direct support. A quarter of private nurseries reported some form of contact, which is higher than might have been expected

given that psychology is a service provided by education departments with a remit focused on local authority services. It is likely that some of this contact would have related to assessing children attending private nurseries with a view to placement in a Regional facility. Very few playgroups or childminders reported contact with staff from the psychological service.

All but two nursery school reported liaison with a speech therapist, and around three quarters were receiving direct support. A high proportion of day nurseries (83%) had contact with the speech therapy service, and half of all day nurseries reported receiving direct support. Among private nurseries, 20% mentioned contact with a speech therapist, all of whom recorded the contact as direct support. Less than ten per cent of playgroups and childminders had any contact with the speech therapy service.

Linking these findings to the above discussion of support for children with special needs, it would appear that nursery schools and day nurseries are able to call on the services of speech therapists and psychologists in relation to both the support of children with special needs and broad support for child development. On the other hand, any contact with private nurseries, playgroups, or childminders would be far more likely to be related to specific children who could be seen as having special needs. In this context, it is notable that although twenty two playgroups reported caring for one or more children with an emotional or behavioural difficulty, just three reported any form of contact with the psychological service.

Asked an open question about liaison with other staff (aside from physiotherapists, speech therapists, psychologists, and those listed in appendix Table 4.8), contact with specialist teachers and with health workers other than health visitors were most frequently mentioned. A similar proportion of nursery schools and day nurseries reported contact with the former (13% and 14%, respectively), while contact with health workers other than health visitors was most frequently specified by day nurseries, at 23%. Only a few others mentioned contact with either of these services.

Specialist training and qualifications

The project sought a range of information relating to the staff complement of the surveyed centres. This information is by nature fairly complex to process and a very detailed analysis was not possible within this project. However, basic information on centres reporting staff with specialist training and qualifications, including recent inservice training is presented in Table 4.6 below as such qualifications and training often relate to the care of children with special needs. Also included is information on centres which reported that they wished further support or training: this covered a variety of areas, including special needs.

Table 4.6 *Specialist training and qualifications*

Staff include one or more member with:	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %
Specialist training	18	16	19	13
Specialist qualifications	36	7	16	13
Recent inservice*	97	98	55	43
Centres wishing further support or training	72	79	64	51

* Defined as inservice training taking place over the previous six months

Nursery schools and day nurseries produced similar findings in respect of specialist training and recent inservice, but only 7% of day nurseries as compared to over a third of nursery schools had at least one member of staff with some form of specialist qualification. Findings in respect of private nurseries and playgroups were very similar, although playgroups were less likely to report recent inservice. It should be stressed that these findings relate to centres reporting at least one member of staff in the relevant category, and do not show how many staff had specialist training, qualifications, or recent inservice training.

A majority of the centre heads who completed the questionnaires reported that there were areas of support or training which they would like to see available for themselves or their staff, proportions ranging from 79% in the case of day nurseries to 51% of private nurseries. Childminders were asked a similar question: around a quarter (28%) reported that they would wish further support or training.

Preferences and needs of parents/carers

How are the preferences and needs of parents/carers catered for in matters such as costs, hours, communication, involvement, help and expectations of benefit?

In order to explore the extent to which existing provision meets the childcare needs of parents in various situations the questionnaire asked providers about a range of issues: charges levied; opening times of the provision; modes of communicating with parents; facilities available to parents; any ways in which parents were represented or involved; and perceived parental benefits and comparative disadvantages. In addition, much of the information reported under Research Question 2 is also relevant here, as is information on the perceived main elements in good quality pre-five provision in general, addressed under Research Question 8.

Charging for places

All private nurseries and playgroups all but one childminder reported charging for places (it is possible that the latter result arose from a single coding error as it seems most unlikely that a childminder would provide a free service), as compared to thirty per cent of day nurseries and 9% of nursery schools. Charges levied are illustrated in appendix Tables 4.21 (playgroups' sessional charges) and 4.22 (other providers' hourly charges)

The few nursery schools and day nurseries which charged at all made only a nominal charge, probably to contribute to the cost of meals and snacks. The great majority of charging nursery schools (83%) and all of the day nurseries which charged said that they reduced or waived charges to parents in certain circumstances, mainly relating to the income of the family.

Childminders and private nurseries tended to make more substantial charges, with the majority of both reporting charges of at least eighty pence per hour. Two private nurseries charged £3.20 per hour or more. Almost two-thirds of childminders (65%) said that charges were sometimes reduced. (39% of childminders said that they took local authority sponsored children, in which case the issue of charging the family falls under the jurisdiction of the placing agency). The main group to be offered reduced rates were families on a low income or in financial difficulties, and then those with more than one child attending the childminder: a quarter of childminders referred to such reductions. On

the other hand, fewer than half of the private nurseries (43%) said that there were circumstances in which charges would be reduced. These reductions were less likely to relate to families' financial circumstances than to their use of the service, generally taking the form of reductions for multiple attendance or for periods when a child is absent due to illness or family holidays.

Partnership nurseries were quite different from the private nurseries in terms of charging practice. As previously explained, although all were sampled, only one responded to the survey within the required timescale and so the relevant findings were grouped with those from private nurseries for ease of reference. However, information about charges was gathered from other sources. In one Region, the aim was to allow parents to return to work, for which partnership nurseries charged £15 per week for a full-time place, or to education, for which they were charged £1.50 per week full-time.

Playgroups were asked about sessional charges. Sessions would normally last for between one and a half and three hours. The majority (71%) charged between eighty pence and £1.59 per session. Asked whether charges were ever reduced or waived, 62% of playgroups responded in the affirmative. The most common response regarding the relevant circumstances referred to discounts to families with more than one child attending: 21% of playgroups specified this.

Opening times

Providers were asked about the daily, weekly and yearly opening times of the provision. As might be expected, findings indicate that nursery schools and playgroups, particularly the latter, are not realistic options for parents or carers contemplating full time employment.

Hours per day

Opening hours have been categorised according to whether the service was available for more than, less than, or the same as the primary school day of six and a half hours. Responses are shown in appendix Table 4.23. It should be noted that hours of opening are not necessarily identical to the children's daily attendance period, as some or all children may attend for shorter periods.

A majority of day nurseries, private nurseries, and childminders reported that their service was available for longer than the school day, as compared to around a quarter of nursery schools and no playgroups. In the case of nursery schools, 42% reported operating on a school hours basis, while 30% operated on a shorter day. Almost all playgroups (98%) opened on a less than school hours basis, and the remaining 2% would not necessarily provide all day care, as opposed to catering for a range of children on a sessional basis.

Days per week

Providers were asked to specify the number of days per week when provision was available: responses are shown in appendix Table 4.24. Over 90% of nursery schools, day nurseries and private nurseries reported opening on five days each week (presumably Monday to Friday). No nursery schools or day nurseries opened for more than five days per week, but a small proportion of private nurseries (3%) said that they did so and were open every day. Almost three quarters of childminders (73%) reported minding on a five days per week basis, while around a quarter provided service for less than five days and a very small proportion (3%) also minded at weekends. As might be expected, playgroups tended to open on fewer days, with less than one third (31%) operating on five days each

week and over two thirds providing service on between one and four days. One playgroup reported operating on a six day basis.

Weeks per year

Schools are open for forty weeks per year and the vast majority of nursery schools (93%) followed the school timetable (see appendix Table 4.25). On the other hand, the majority of day nurseries (93%), childminders (80%) and private nurseries (65%) operated for longer periods. Playgroups were more likely than other forms of provision to operate for less than the school year, although only 18% of playgroups fell into this category.

Communication with parents

Group providers were presented with a list of methods which might be used to keep parents informed of activities and events relating to the centre, and asked to indicate those which they employed. Responses are shown in appendix Table 4.26, from which it can be seen that the vast majority of providers communicated with parents by talking with them during the times when children were being dropped off or picked up (proportions reporting this ranging from 88% of playgroups to 100% of nursery schools) and by the use of a noticeboard (ranging from 87% of playgroups to 99% of nursery schools). Almost all nursery schools (96%) and most day nurseries (87%) provided parents with a handbook when their children started attending; slightly less than half of private nurseries (48%) and playgroups (45%) did so. Nursery schools and day nurseries were also more much more likely to produce written reports for parents (at 63% and 54%, respectively) than were private nurseries (16%) and playgroups (2%). Day nurseries were twice as likely as nursery schools to report involvement in a home visiting scheme (41% as compared to 21%): very few private nurseries or playgroups made home visits.

Most such methods of communication would be inappropriate to childminders. Instead, childminders were asked about the sort of things they discussed with parents in an open ended question (see appendix Table 4.27). The majority (82%) said that they discussed issues relating to the children's behaviour, health, and/or happiness, and that they told parents about activities undertaken by their child (64%). Asked whether there were any subjects which they would not discuss with parents, a few childminders specified parents' child rearing practices, or anything said in confidence by the child.

Facilities for parents

Group providers were asked an open question as to the nature of any facilities available to parents: responses are shown in appendix Table 4.28. Almost half of the nursery schools (47%) said that they had a parents' room or kitchen available, as compared to over a third of playgroups (38%) and around a quarter of day nurseries (24%) and private nurseries (23%). Day nurseries were the most frequent providers of other parental facilities. For example, nearly all day nurseries reported having an information board for the use of parents, while very few other providers mentioned having this facility. Furthermore, only in day nurseries did providers report making communications equipment available for parents (although only 10% did so), and parents classes or groups were also most commonly reported by day nurseries (at 15%).

Parental representation

Group providers were shown a list of bodies which might serve as vehicles for parental representation, and asked to indicate any which they employed. Responses are illustrated

in appendix Table 4.29. The extent of parental representation and the means used to effect this reflect providers' varying organisational natures and philosophies. For example, playgroups are voluntary organisations which are highly dependent on parents for administration and support and as such the high proportion of playgroups involving parents on a management committee (72%) is to be expected. The vast majority of nursery schools indicated some form of parental representation, commonly a parent/teacher association (35%), or school board (relevant to nursery classes) or equivalent (27%). Day nurseries, on the other hand, were more likely to have parental representation via a management committee (36%), pre-five forum (15%), or by some other means (39%): all reported some form of parental involvement. Only around one fifth of the private nurseries indicated any mode of parental representation; 13% reported that parents were represented on a management committee.

Parental involvement

Parental involvement can be addressed to a variety of purposes, ranging from providing practical services such as undertaking support activities including fund-raising and auxiliary tasks, through assistance with basic tasks - helping their child to 'settle' in the centre, for example - to participation in the centre's core functions with respect to children's education and personal development, as in sharing with staff in formulating the centre's aims. (A typology of parental involvement is set out in the relevant section of Chapter 6.) Group providers were asked to indicate from a checklist reflecting the potential range of involvement any ways in which parents participated in the centre's activities. Responses are illustrated in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 *Parental involvement*

	Nursery schools %	Day Nurseries %	Private Nurseries %	Playgroups %
Parents are invited to attend functions	100	96	68	82
Parents involved in organising fund raising	84	91	26	90
Parents can drop in for tea/chat	67	94	29	45
Parents perform auxiliary services	57	39	3	55
Parents work in the group with children	73	61	7	77
Parents follow up work at home	81	90	36	23
Parents help assess their own children	48	74	29	13
Parents have access to information held	75	89	45	44
Parents help plan of activities with staff	16	48	13	47
Parents share with staff in formulating aims	25	52	32	41
Number of responding centres	67	46	31	158

Generally speaking, higher incidence of parental involvement were reported in respect of basic support activities as compared to activities intrinsic to the children's learning and development in the centre. For example, among all forms of provision the most frequently

mentioned involvement activity was parental attendance at functions, the reported incidence ranging from 68% in the case of private nurseries to 100% of nursery schools. By contrast, the range of proportions reporting parental involvement with staff in planning the centre's activities was from 13% of private nurseries to 48% in the case of day nurseries.

However, considerable variation by provision type emerged: as with parental representation, the extent and nature of parental involvement varied, reflecting the nature and philosophy of the organisation concerned.

Day nurseries were the provision type reporting the highest incidence of parental involvement in respect of seven of the ten items on the checklist, the exceptions being attending functions (a close second to nursery schools) and performing auxiliary services and working with children in the centre (third to nursery schools and playgroups in respect of both). This generally high level of parental involvement may result from the philosophy of social work provision with respect to a holistic family model. It is relevant to note that around one third of day nurseries (and nursery schools too) specified recognition of the importance of the parents' role in response to an open question on the main elements of good quality pre-five care in general (see Table 4.9).

Parents of children at nursery schools were less likely than day nursery parents to be involved in decision making processes such as helping plan centre activities and sharing with staff in formulating aims, and were also less likely to be given the opportunity to drop in to the centre socially. On the other hand, they were more likely to be invited to attend functions and to perform auxiliary services than were any other group of parents, and substantial proportions of nursery schools reported that parents followed up work at home (81%) and that parents worked in the centre with the children (73%), although the nature of this work was not explored.

Private nurseries reported the lowest levels of parental involvement on six of the listed activities, and ranked second lowest (after playgroups) on the remaining four. This is likely to reflect the fact that parents who work full-time tend to use private nurseries to meet their child care needs.

Only one item from the parental involvement checklist was indicated most frequently by playgroups; this was involvement in working in the group with children, which was specified by 77% of responding playgroups, reflecting playgroups' dependence on parents for their basic functioning. Apart from attendance at functions, as reported above, the only other types of parental involvement indicated by more than half of responding playgroups were organising fund-raising and performing auxiliary services. This picture again reflects the fact that playgroups are voluntary organisations and highly dependent on parents for administration and certain forms of support .

Advantages to parents

Providers were asked an open question as to the main advantages to parents arising from their child's attendance at the provision. A wide range were specified: these have been categorised into ten specific groups and a residual category ('other'), as shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 *Advantages to parents*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private provision %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Knowledge of child's safety	42	27	77	32	65
Socialising with other parents at the centre	42	41	3	53	0
Respite from child	28	46	7	40	7
Able to work	9	39	37	7	30
Opportunities to develop/educate self	16	56	10	8	0
Staff to advise them	34	37	7	5	0
Take part in activities	20	29	0	26	0
Children prepared for school	30	5	13	11	1
Drop in facilities	6	5	0	1	0
Support for child with special needs	2	5	0	0	0
Other	25	27	17	8	44
Number of responding centres	64	41	30	152	169

Some of the advantages mentioned in response to this question related primarily to children rather than to their parents. Indeed, the knowledge that their child was being cared for in a safe environment was the most frequently mentioned parental advantage on the part of private nurseries, childminders, and nursery schools (jointly with the opportunity for parents to socialise, in the case of the latter). Furthermore, some providers responded in terms of the child's preparation for school or the opportunity for support to a child with special needs.

In terms of benefits accruing to parents in their own right, there was a great deal of variation between provision types both in the proportions specifying a given advantage and in the nature of the advantages most frequently specified.

Day nurseries were most likely to perceive their provision as having advantages for parents, recording the highest proportions in respect of six of the seven strictly parental advantages (the exception being parental opportunities to socialise with other parents at the centre), and with a lower proportion responding in terms of benefits to the children. For example, the most frequently specified parental advantage was the opportunity for parents to develop and educate themselves: this was specified by 56% of the day nurseries, the only occasion on which a benefit was mentioned by more than half of a category of providers. Such opportunities might arise through parental involvement in the activities of the centre, or might accrue from the provision of childcare freeing parents to pursue educational courses elsewhere. Nursery schools were next most likely to mention this, but only 16% did so. Parental respite from their child was mentioned by almost half of day nurseries, and parental opportunities to socialise and to work were specified by around four in ten.

After the opportunity to socialise, nursery schools were most likely to mention the availability of staff to give advice as an advantage to parents: around one third of nursery

schools (and day nurseries) specified this. On the other hand, this was mentioned by less than ten per cent of private nurseries and playgroups and not at all by childminders. It is interesting to note that nursery schools were slightly more likely than day nurseries (at 35%) to mention the recognition of parents' needs as a main element of good quality pre-five provision in general (see Table 4.9), despite being notably less likely to mention parental advantages accruing from their child's attendance in response to this question.

Playgroups generally indicated a more limited range of advantages to parents than did day nurseries and nursery schools. The most frequently specified parental advantage was the opportunity for parents to socialise. This was specified by over half of the playgroups (a higher proportion than for any other provider), reflecting the common practice of parental involvement in the basic running of playgroups: over three quarters had indicated that parents worked in the group with children (see Table 4.8). The only other advantages specified by over 20% of playgroups were respite, knowledge of the child's safety, and taking part in activities. As only a quarter indicated the latter, this suggests that most playgroups where parents are involved in working in the group with children do not perceive this as being of advantage to parents.

Aside from the knowledge that their child was being cared for in a safe environment, private nurseries were most likely to see advantages in terms of parents being able to work; even so, only around one third mentioned this.

A substantial minority of responses fell into the residual 'other' category. This generally represents a varied group of responses, each occurring in a small minority of cases. However, as childminders operate quite differently to group provision some of the categories derived from analysis of the group responses are less relevant or not relevant at all, and 44% of childminders mentioned one or more 'other' advantages. Childminders' responses relating to the specific categories were similar to those of private nurseries, with parents' knowledge of their child's safety and freedom to work being most frequently specified. Indeed, these were the only listed advantages noted by more than 10% of childminders.

It is interesting to compare providers' responses to this open question with the proportions allocating a 'very important' rating to a list of service aims (see Tables 4.2a, 4.2b), which included aims related to parents.

Although substantial proportions of nursery schools and playgroups specified socialising as a benefit to parents, they were much less likely to rate this as 'very important' (at 16% and 17%, respectively). On the other hand, the same proportion of day nurseries (41%) specified socialising as a benefit and rated it as 'very important'.

Respite was also less likely to be seen as 'very important' by nursery schools and playgroups. Although 40% of playgroups mentioned respite here, only 13% rated had this as 'very important' (see Table 4.2b), indicating that although some playleaders appreciate that this accrues, they do not necessarily see it as of great importance in terms of the playgroup's aims. The respective proportions for nursery schools were 28% and 11%.

Comparative disadvantages for parents

Providers were asked an open question as to the nature of any disadvantages for parents whose children attended their provision, as opposed to other forms of pre-five care. The majority of informants in all provision types said that they did not perceive any such disadvantages to parents. However, 45% of nursery schools and around one quarter of all

other providers said that there were some disadvantages for parents who used their provision. These were categorised into five specific types and a residual 'other' group. Responses are shown in appendix Table 4.30.

Around a quarter of nursery schools (26%) felt that the part time nature of their provision was a disadvantage to parents. However, only 7% of playgroups, which also provide part-time provision, identified this as a disadvantage. (Similarly, more nursery schools than playgroups identified the part-time nature of the provision as a disadvantage to children: see appendix Table 4.13.)

The recognition by around one quarter of private nurseries that the cost of their provision may be a disadvantage to parents is of note. By contrast just 4% of childminders, who also tend to levy considerable charges, specified this. Costs were also mentioned by 11% of playgroups. Day nurseries and nursery schools tend to levy a nominal charge if any, and so it is not surprising that this was mentioned by just 2% of day nurseries and no nursery schools. (Findings on charges are illustrated in appendix Tables 4.21 and 4.22).

As in the case of responses regarding advantages to parents, the residual 'other' group covers a substantial proportion of responses regarding disadvantages on the part of childminders. Again, this is likely to reflect the fact that childminders operate quite differently to group provision, making some of the categories derived from analysis of the group responses inappropriate.

■ Responses about quality

What do participants perceive as good quality child care provision?

To an extent this Research Question overlaps with all of the others, in that perceptions of quality are relevant in relation to each subject. For example, staff qualifications and training, often held to be of importance to the delivery of a high quality service, are reported under Research Question 4. However, the questionnaire survey produced some general information on this subject, seeking providers' views as to what constitute the main elements of quality pre-five provision, and asking them to rate eleven aims of a high quality child care service as drawn up by the European Commission Childcare Network. In both instances, informants were asked to consider what makes for quality provision in general, the aims of their own service and the perceived benefits arising to children and parents having been considered elsewhere. However, an attempt has been made to note relevant comparisons.

Aims of a high quality childcare service

Informants were presented with a list of eleven aims of a high quality child care service in terms of the opportunities which such a service should provide children to experience, as drawn up by the European Commission Childcare Network, and were asked to rate these on a four point scale of importance (ranging from 'very important' to 'hardly important').

Appendix Table 4.31 lists these aims and presents information by provision type on the proportion allocating a 'very important' rating. In general, a higher proportion of day nurseries and nursery schools allocated a 'very important' rating than did private nurseries, with playgroups and childminders being least likely to allocate a 'very important' rating to most of the listed aims.

Nonetheless, most elements were rated highly, and a majority of providers in all categories allocated a 'very important' rating to all of the listed aims with the exception of 'cultural diversity', and 'spontaneous and/or creative expression'. The latter was rated as 'very important' by less than half of childminders and playgroups, while 'cultural diversity' was rated as 'very important' by less than half of all types of provision with the exception of day nurseries (where two thirds assigned a 'very important' rating). It is perhaps relevant to note that substantially higher proportions of all providers rated 'equal opportunities irrespective of gender, race and disability' as 'very important'.

The aim which the highest proportion of all but nursery schools rated as 'very important' was 'happiness'. Although 88% of nursery schools rated this as 'very important', the aim which received this rating from the highest proportion was 'self-confidence and interest in learning', at 94%. Private nurseries were equally likely to rate both this and 'happiness' as 'very important'. Opportunities for 'a safe and healthy life' were also rated highly.

Elements of quality

Providers were also asked an open question as to what they perceived to be the main elements in good quality pre-five provision. A wide range of quality elements were specified. These have been categorised into nine specific groups and a residual category labelled 'other'. Responses are shown in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 *Main elements in good quality pre-5 provision*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
A safe and caring environment	71	69	71	78	81
Help children develop socially emotionally and physically	52	58	39	55	39
Provide a variety of experiences for children	51	47	50	35	30
Able to meet the needs of all children	43	53	25	20	11
Qualified staff	38	20	32	14	5
Recognition of parental needs	35	31	11	6	6
Recognition of importance of parents' role in a child's development	31	31	7	11	5
Preparing children for school	18	9	4	9	9
Interagency working	8	9	0	4	0
Other	31	36	14	5	14
Number of responding centres	65	45	28	142	152

The provision of a safe and caring environment was by far the most frequently specified general quality element among all providers. Helping children to develop socially, emotionally, and physically also featured prominently. Providing a variety of experiences was among the three most frequently specified quality elements on the part of all providers

with the exception of day nurseries, among whom this came fourth to the ability to meet the needs of all children. The latter was also mentioned by a substantial minority of nursery schools.

The services of qualified staff were most frequently specified as a major element in quality provision by nursery schools (38%) and private nurseries (32%).

Recognition of parental needs and the importance of parents' role in a child's development were mentioned by around one third of nursery schools and day nurseries, although day nurseries had been far more likely than nursery schools to allocate a 'very important' rating to service aims relating to parents needs (see Table 4.2b) and to see their service as having advantages for parents (Table 4.8). Both were specified as a quality element by much lower proportions of private nurseries, playgroups and childminders.

Preparation for school was mentioned infrequently by all providers, the highest incidence (18%) occurring in the case of nursery schools. However, preparation for school emerged more strongly when providers were asked to rate its importance in relation to their own service (Table 4.2a) and in responses to an open question on benefits to children arising from attendance at the provision (Table 4.4).

A few day nurseries, nursery schools, and playgroups mentioned the importance of interagency working: this was not referred to at all by private nurseries or childminders. Findings on practice in this regard are discussed under Research Questions 1 and 4.

Around one third of day nurseries and nursery schools mentioned one or more other quality elements. This category tends to represent a varied group of responses, each occurring in a small minority of cases.

Information about the childminders

Childminders provide an important service both as the first carers outside the home for some children and as a supplementary service for other children who may attend playgroup, nursery school or everyday nursery. This section collates, information about childminders' circumstances collected through the survey.

Age

Well over half (61%) of the childminders were in their thirties. Only 10% were under 30 years of age, while 16% were aged 40-44 and 14% were aged 45 or over. Childminders were asked about their qualifications. Almost half of responding child minders (45%) reported having some form of qualification directly related to childcare. For example, as appendix Table 4.32 shows, 11% had undertaken an Open University course or similar, and 9% had completed a playleaders course. Seven out of ten childminders reported having some type of educational certification or qualification, aside from qualifications specifically related to childcare. The most commonly held qualifications were 'O' grades: these were mentioned by 46% of childminders. (see appendix Table 4.33). As it is generally accepted that those responding to surveys tend to be disproportionately drawn from the higher socio-economic groups. This would suggest that the 50% of childminders who responded to this survey were likely to be better educated than the others who did not.

Almost all of the responding childminders (99%) had children of their own, and 87% had children under 14. This information, taken together with that on duration of minding experience, suggests that childminding may be engaged in for a fairly limited period, running alongside the raising of childminders' own children.

Childminding experience

Almost two thirds of childminders (64%) were looking after between one and three children, while 19% were minding four or five children and 10% were looking after more than five. Eight per cent of responding childminders were not currently minding any children. Just over half of child minders (56%) reported minding for three years or less. Around a quarter (28%) had been minding for between four and seven years, and 15% for longer than this.

Making their services known

Childminders were asked how parents found out about their services. The most commonly reported method was via the social work department, which 49% of childminders specified. A fairly high proportion (40%) reported that parents found out about their services from other parents. One third reported parents finding out about them from other minders, suggesting that some form of networking takes place, while 10% mentioned advertising their services in places such as local shops and newspapers, and 26% specified other means.

■ Summary

Findings are based on the responses to a postal questionnaire by 186 childminders and 303 group providers (67 nursery schools and classes; 46 day nurseries, family centres, and community nurseries; 30 private nurseries; 1 partnership nursery; and 159 playgroups). Response rates varied between 44% for private nurseries and 67% for nursery schools. (Details of sampling and response rates is given on P3-9/10.) The relatively high response rates provides a strong base for the conclusions set out below.

The following summary highlights the most important findings emerging in relation to each of the six Research Questions addressed by this method.

Research Question 1 (relating to links with and preparation for formal schooling)
Liaison with primary schools

- Some form of liaison with primary schools took place at almost all nursery schools and at around three-quarters of day nurseries but this liaison was predominately one way with primary staff rarely visiting pre-five setting's.
- Fewer than half of private nurseries and playgroups reported liaison.
- Liaison over curricular matters was reported by just seventeen centres in total from approximately three hundred surveyed.

Record Keeping

- Local authority providers are more likely to keep records than other providers . At least 25% of playgroups and 35% of private nurseries and childminders reported that they did not keep records.
- Nursery schools were more likely (96%) than other providers to report keeping information on children's curricular progress: however, less than half - 44% - did so. Only 2% of playgroups and no childminders kept notes on children's curricular progress.

Research Question 2 (relating to educational and social provision and its match to families' needs)

Waiting lists

- Almost all day nurseries and around three quarters of other group providers reported having a waiting list for entry. Almost 40% of all day nurseries had a waiting list for full-time places which at least equalled their current roll. Just over three quarters of private nurseries and nursery schools reported having a waiting list. 72 % of playgroups had waiting lists.
- Six percent of childminders said that they had a waiting list. This may suggest some spare capacity within the childminding service or that local authorities may hold the waiting lists.

Ages of children

- 92% of nursery schools and 57% of day nurseries were predominantly catering for children in their pre school year. Private nurseries reported a greater variation in terms of the ages of children with 37% predominately catering for children in their pre-school year and 23% catering for children under 2. Only 2% of nursery schools and 9% of day nurseries reported catering predominately for children of 2 years or less.
- 90% of the children attending playgroups were either three or four years of age.
- One third of the children catered for by childminders were aged two years or less.

Families using more than one childcare service

- Over half of the centres surveyed reported the presence of children attending at least another provider; as many as 75% of playgroups and 71% private nurseries reported this. These alternative services were most commonly playgroups and childminders who apparently provide complementary services for parents for all other groups even private nurseries
- Seventy percent of childminders reported that they take one or more children to some form of group provision.

The family: ethnic background

- Around one in five group providers and one childminder reported having the care of one or more child whose first language was not English.
- Only fourteen group providers (around 5%) - mainly nursery schools and day nurseries - reported that any of their childcare staff were from an ethnic, cultural, or religious minority group.

Research Question 3 (concerning contributions to children's development)

- Providers indicated that the major benefits perceived to arise from children's attendance at their provision related to general social and emotional development, as opposed to the attainment of specific cognitive outcomes.
- Attainment of these social and emotional benefits might well be to a child's advantage when adapting to the formal school environment, thereby helping maximise learning potential.

Research Question 4 (relating to provision for children with special needs)
Special needs catered for

- Day nurseries and nursery schools are more likely than other providers to report that children with special needs attend, whether stemming from physical difficulty (50% and 56% respectively of providers), learning difficulties (70% and 65%) and/or emotional/behavioural problems (80% and 46%). It should be borne in mind in looking at these figures that very young children with difficulties may have priority for a full-time place in day nurseries

Supporting children with special needs

- Less than two in ten centres reported having any staff with specialist training of any kind.
- Staff with specialist qualifications were most likely to be found in nursery schools - over a third had at least one such member of staff.
- A wish for further support and training was reported by a majority of all group providers although the nature of such training was not specified.

Research Question 5 (relating to parental preferences and needs)
Costs to parents

- The variation in reported costs - other than snacks and meals- range from no charge (for example, in around 90% of nursery schools), to £3.50 or more per hour (in the case of two private nurseries). 71% of playgroup charge from 80p - £1.59 per session; 93% of childminders and 81% of private nurseries charge between 80p and £3.19 per hour.
- While day nurseries and some partnership nurseries do provide a low cost service to parents, they are few in number (As of March 1992 there were 5684 places available in local authority day nurseries as compared to 48127 places in local authority nursery schools by September 1993): indeed in some Regions there are none at all.

Opening times

- Day nurseries are the service tending to provide the longest daily opening periods, followed by childminders and private nurseries.
- The vast majority of playgroups (98%) open for less than six and a half hours per day.
- The majority of providers, except playgroups, provide a service on five days per week, however weekend and evening service is rare.
- Day nurseries and childminders are most likely to provide a year round service (80% of each reported this).

Parental communication representation and involvement

- Basic methods of communication, such as chatting with parents when they call for their children and posting notices for parents' attention, are widely practised.
- In terms of formal mechanisms for parental representation such as parent/teacher associations and management committees, private nurseries have notably lower levels of parental representation and parental involvement than do other group providers.

- Parents are more likely to be involved in respect of basic support activities as compared to activities intrinsic to the children's learning and development in the centre.
- The highest levels of parental involvement tend to occur in day nurseries, for example, 52% of day nurseries reported involving parents in working with staff to formulate the aims of the centre.
- Aside from a parents' room or kitchen, which a substantial minority of all centres have, 23% of private nurseries to 47% of nursery schools, parental facilities are provided by few centres other than day nurseries.

Parental benefits and disadvantages

- Thirty nine percent of day nurseries , 37% of private providers and 30% of childminders identify parents being able to work as an advantage arising from their child's attendance.
- Nursery schools are more likely than other providers to perceive their provision as having relative disadvantages to parents.
- A quarter of private nurseries saw their cost to parents as a disadvantage.

Research Question 8 (relating to participants' views on good quality child care provision)

- In general, providers rated opportunities to experience 'happiness' and 'a safe and healthy life' as 'very important' while those least likely to be perceived as 'very important' were the opportunities to experience 'cultural diversity' and 'spontaneous and/or creative expression'.

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5 Where Children and Staff Work

The early childhood environmental rating scale

Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings resulting from applying the Early Childhood Environmental Scale (ECERS) to the sixteen study centres. While the ECERS is normally used by centres as a diagnostic tool, it has also been used by outside researchers and evaluators. In this project, the purpose was to provide information about the selected centres on a range of standardised indicators relating to qualitative issues, allowing a degree of comparison both between and within different types of provision.

The construction of the scale reflects a distinct set of ideas and values on what a quality environment should have, and relates to the following aspects: use of space, use of materials and experiences to enhance children's development, daily schedule, and supervision provided. Use of the ECERS produces a profile comprising ratings on the following seven sub-scale components:

1 ***Personal Care Routines***

Routines concerned with the health, comfort, and well being of children (eg rest provision and nappy changing).

2 ***Furnishings and Display***

Management and use of furniture, storage shelves, and display space (which are seen as necessary in providing personal care and education for the children).

3 ***Language-Reasoning Experiences***

Use of materials, activities and interactions to help children communicate in words and to use relationships basic to thought such as size, comparative relationships, and cause and effect.

4 ***Fine and Gross Motor Activities***

Use of materials, activities and exercises for control and development of small muscles (fine motor activity) and larger muscles (gross motor activity).

5 ***Creative Activities***

Use of creative activities and materials such as in art and dramatic play.

6 ***Social development***

Guiding the development of children's positive self-images and helping to establish interaction skills.

7 Adult Needs

Provision of space and equipment for the key adults in the pre-five setting: parents and staff.

Each of the sub-scales is split into various elements for scoring purposes, with clear descriptors provided for each element to be scored. A description of the scoring procedure and discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the ECERS can be found in Chapter 2 'Methodology'.

For ease of reference in reporting findings nursery schools and classes are termed nursery schools, while day nurseries, family centres, and community nurseries are communally referred to as day nurseries.

■ Findings

The seven sub-scales

Profiles summarising the scores for each type of study provision are shown in Appendix 5. These give the average value and range of scores encountered, along with lines indicating the required score for both 'minimal' and 'good' provision as defined by Harms and Clifford. It should be noted that the scales on the graphs are organised in such a fashion as to carry equal weight, even though some may be more salient in terms of meeting children's needs than others. For example, it could be argued that a high rating on 'Creative Activities' or 'Social Development' should be looked upon more favourably than a high rating on 'Adult Needs', as the latter does not necessarily impinge on the quality of children's experience.

Nursery schools and day nurseries

The profile for the five nursery schools (Appendix 5; Graph A) is very similar to that for the three day nurseries (Appendix 5; Graph B), with the vast majority of ratings being above 'good' and none at or below the 'minimum' rating. Differences in average scores were within a few points of each other, with a maximum of three points of a difference occurring on the 'Fine and Gross Motor Activities' scale, the average score on which was 36 for day nurseries as compared to 33 for nursery schools.

The nursery schools showed the greatest variation of any type of provision on two of the sub-scales - 'Furnishings and Display', and 'Fine and Gross Motor Activities' - while day nurseries varied greatly in terms of provision for 'Adult Needs'.

Private nurseries

The scores obtained by the two private nurseries were generally lower than those for nursery schools and day nurseries. Both private nurseries scored below 'good' on 'Furnishings and Display', 'Language and Reasoning Experiences', 'Social Development', and 'Adult Needs', although with the exception of one centre's score on the latter all were above the 'minimal' rating.

The two private nurseries (Appendix 5; Graph C) produced similar scores to each other on five of the seven sub-scale ratings, but varied considerably in relation to 'Personal Care Routines' and 'Adult Needs'.

Partnership nurseries

Both partnership initiatives (Appendix 5; Graph D) related very similarly to each other on all of the sub-scales and generally rated well, although both dipped below 'good on 'Fine and Gross Motor Activities'.

Playgroups

In the case of the playgroups profiled (Appendix 5; Graph E), average scores on each of the seven sub-scales fell below 'good'. However, only one of the four playgroups produced a 'minimal' score: this was on 'Adult Needs'. In terms of the range of scores encountered, playgroups showed greater variation than any other type of provision on three of the seven sub-scale components: 'Language and Reasoning Experiences', 'Creative Activities', and 'Social Development'.

Comparison on a compound measure

The information on average scores by provision type (Appendix 5; Graph F) was used to produce an overall indication of the provision types' comparative positions. Average scores on each of the seven areas covered by the ECERS were ranked 1 to 5, with the provision type having the highest average being accorded rank one. These ranks were summed to provide a compound rating, with potential scores ranging from seven (rank 1 on all seven sub scales) to 35 (rank 5 on all seven sub scales). Results are shown in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 *Comparison of centres on a compound measure*

Combined Rank	Provision Type	
8	Day nurseries	n=3
11	Nursery schools	n=5
18	Partnership nurseries	n=2
29	Playgroups	n=4
31	Private nurseries	n=2

This exercise showed that the study group of nursery schools, day nurseries and partnership nurseries generally faired better on the ECERS profiles than did the private nurseries and playgroups. This was partly due to variations in the nature of the premises used, which affect certain elements of the sub-scales. For example, on the 'Personal Care Routines' scale the presence of child-sized toilets is a factor, and many playgroups are run in multi purpose venues which are unlikely to offer this facility. Equally, premises which could be described as 'cosy and homelike, and as such were said to be desirable by staff and parents (see Chapter 6), could be restricted in terms of scope for gross motor activities and adult personal space, and thus score lower on these elements of the 'Fine and Gross Motor Activities' and 'Adult Needs' subscales respectively. (This was certainly the case in one of the private nurseries and one of the partnership nurseries.)

■ Summary

The results presented here are based on the use of the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) in 16 study centres (3 Day nurseries, 5 Nursery Schools, 2 Partnership nurseries, 4 Playgroups and 2 Private Nurseries). See page 5-1 for a

description of the scale. The profiles were completed by a researcher over a continuous period of two hours in each of the centres. Profiles were completed using observations and supplementary questioning of staff. While we have to be cautious about making general statements about different types of provision based on such small numbers of centres the data does not contradict the findings from the questionnaire survey and as such can be seen to provide further illumination on several of the areas explored in the survey. These include: the facilities and equipment present in the centre; some indication of the uses of such materials; activities engaged in by the children; and the role of staff.

Summary of findings

- All 16 study centres scored above the minimum on all seven sub-scales except private nurseries which dipped below minimal on the "meeting adult needs" sub scale. Therefore all the study centres have the facilities to provide children with a variety of experiences and activities.
- The greatest variation in scoring was recorded by playgroups, on 'Language and Reasoning Experiences', 'Creative Activities', and 'Social Development'. Such variation is likely to be related to the variations in premises used, equipment, and whether or not a trained playleader is present.
- The profiles for nursery schools, day nurseries and partnership nurseries were very similar. This suggests that in relation to the care and education of the children attending the different types of provision, there are more similarities than differences.

This is the most interesting feature to emerge as it challenges a traditional distinction often made between daycare facilities (such as day nurseries and community nurseries) and education establishments (such as nursery schools and classes). It has been assumed that care has been the main priority for the former and education for the latter. On the evidence presented in the small sample of ECERS profiles this distinction does not appear to be present, even though only one of the three day nurseries profiled employed a teacher on the staff.

6 Considerations of Quality

Interviews with staff and parents

Introduction

This chapter of the report deals with information on parents' and providers' perceptions of quality obtained during interviews largely based on an original method which involved using photographs of children and adults in various pre-five settings as stimulus material to prompt discussion. In the case of aspects of quality in pre-five provision which are difficult to illustrate in a photograph - staff development issues, for example - informants were asked directly about their current requirements and practice.

A total of fifty staff and fifty nine parents took part; three of the staff and four of the parents were male. Staff were interviewed individually but parents could, and often did, elect to be interviewed together. As with the other elements of the detailed study, this exercise was carried out with group providers and as a result of resource and logistical considerations, did not include childminders.

It should be borne in mind that the number of centres involved was fairly small (sixteen in all). Also, although staff and parents often referred to practice in their own centres when discussing perceptions of quality, this was not directly observed. However, this exercise is complementary to others, such as the questionnaire survey which covered much larger numbers of providers (but no parents), and the observations of children and staff which offered the opportunity to compare intentions with practice, and it proved useful in providing the opportunity for in-depth discussion on a range of relevant issues. A full description of the method used is provided in Chapter 3.

This part of investigation does not lend itself to rigorous quantitative assessments. Rather, it has been analysed within an illuminative qualitative framework, with an indication of the weight of opinion and views on particular areas and topics. Multi-layered and complex ideas about the pre-five environment - for example, in relation to what facilitates children's learning - were expressed. While such information is clearly concerned with Research Question 8 on perceptions of quality, the interviews also produced findings relevant to each of the other Research Questions,. In order to preserve the flow of ideas expressed, detailed findings are discussed below under the following main headings:

Purpose and content of learning

Context of learning

Recording and evaluation

The centre and the community

Staff development

Benefits for parents and children

In the interests of ease of reference in the following discussion of findings, nursery schools and classes are termed nursery schools, while day nurseries, family centres, and community nurseries are communally referred to as day nurseries.

■ Purpose and content of learning

One of the major themes emerging concerned the nature of what children learn in their pre-five setting, and how this relates to school. The photographs were used to relate staffs' views on learning to practice in their own centre and parents' views to their own children's experiences.

Broad learning aims

Most interviewees indicated the importance of both social outcomes and more formal educative outcomes for children. For example, several heads of centres made general comments about the aims of pre-five provision vis-a-vis learning, expressing the aims of a pre-five centre as developing the whole child as an independent, confident and self motivated learner.

> *We help children to become independent learners for school, developing self-confidence and awareness, able to look after their own needs, and with the ability to make choices. From this, other learning will follow.*
>
> Day nursery officer in charge

Relatedly, several staff, like the following day nursery nurse, stressed that they were aiming to help develop the child for life and not just for the formal education system:

> *The main thing for the nursery is that children are in a secure and happy environment. We are developing independence, free thinking, and choice. Children should be valued for what they are and for what they can do. Yes, readiness for school is important, but we are getting them ready for life*

Regarding specific skills and abilities, the importance of language development through social interaction was emphasised:

> *One of the most important jobs in the nursery is language development and listening.....Staff have good interaction with the children which leads to a lot of language development.*
>
> Day nursery officer in charge

The value of pre-five provision in affording children the opportunity to socialise with other children and adults was widely stressed, with many parents and staff referring to the role of pre-five provision in helping children to develop skills relevant to relationship forming.

> *Children learn to share and socialise, they learn an awful lot.*
>
> Playgroup parent

> *Learning to co-operate and be part of a group is of the essence. It is good to have several adults as the children learn to address different adults.*
>
> Nursery school teacher

> *The teacher is with the children and leading them, they are not just left to their own devices. They are learning to sit together.*
>
> Nursery school parent

The latter quote touches on the role of staff in the learning process: this is explored further in the section on 'Facilitating learning' below.

While staff saw the aims of pre-five provision as being far wider than preparation of children for school, this was nonetheless felt to be an important element of the experience. Many staff saw the development of social and interpersonal skills, whereby children learn how to learn, as their most important contribution to children's preparation for school. For example;

> *Some work of the nursery should fit in with that of the school. We do have a curriculum here and we do hope to cover a lot of this work. Children get social and interpersonal skills for school which can make things easier for them. It is more important that they can sit and listen rather than count. Developing their own self esteem is important.*
>
> Nursery school teacher

> *...they will encounter circumstances which will benefit them for school, such as mixing and socialising, and working in small groups.*
>
> Day nursery nurse

Concerning directly academic aims, it was evident that there was some concern on the part of staff about the pressure from the 5-14 programme on the curriculum for children under five. The general feeling was that a move towards the kind of structure and curriculum operated by the schools would challenge their own flexibility and child-centred approach, which essentially involves allowing children making their own learning decisions and choices (this approach is discussed below in the section on 'Facilitating learning'). The following quotes are representative of staff opinion on this subject.

> *We seek to meet the needs of the children and to provide education for life - and not just the 5 to 14 development programme. The nursery needs to be part of - not just an addition - to the programme.*
>
> Nursery school headteacher

> *The new 5 -14 curriculum and the ideas about extending it downwards are a bit scary, especially the assessment process. Pre-five centres do need a structure, they are not just places to play, but having too many restraints put on you leads to inflexibility. Losing flexibility would worry me. It is useful to have aims and goals written down. Testing children at five is a total nonsense.*
>
> Partnership nursery teacher

> *The guidelines as they are would remove the freedom of the child to do what they wanted and when, and more emphasis would be placed on pushing the child through the curriculum.*
>
> Partnership nursery nurse

> *Our curriculum gives children the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to make sense of whatever curriculum they meet. We avoid teaching to a system. A lot of our children probably already attain in terms of the 5–14 curriculum. The expert's role is in knowing what they want to get out of this.*
>
> Nursery school headteacher

On the other hand a playleader, commenting on the importance of imparting a love of reading through use of books, added that the playgroup worked towards level A of the 5-14 development programme, and a partnership nursery nurse working for Strathclyde Region, which had produced a 0-5 curriculum document for comments, gave an unequivocal welcome to the new development:

> *I think there is a benefit for children from the new 0-5 curriculum. We do cover a lot of the material anyway. The curriculum would formalise and systematise this.*

Staff specified a range of benefits to children who had pre-five provision experience in terms of their introduction to school. For example;

> *The primary one teacher has reported that the children who came through the playgroup were more likely to sit and behave better, have good pencil control, and didn't need supervision in comparison to the children who arrived at school [directly from home].*
>
> Playgroup playleader

Among parents there was general recognition of the role pre-five provision could play in helping children prepare for and adjust to school. Most comments stressed the benefits of social interaction for children; for example, learning to share, to follow routines, and to take turns at activities and becoming accustomed to sitting at tables and in groups. One parent did suggest that the 'school regime' should not be extended down into the nursery setting as the children's experiences would become too narrow.

However, while many parents saw pre-five provision as directly relevant to children vis-a-vis preparation for school in academic terms, a few expressed reservations or even dissatisfaction with this idea. For example, the parent of a child attending a private nursery made it clear that she was looking for a warm and caring environment and the opportunity for social development: educative outcomes were a desirable bonus, but not a necessity. And the parent of a child attending a playgroup commented:

> *This looks like an introduction to counting. I prefer to see more social skills being developed. Leaving counting and writing for when the children start primary school.*
>
> Playgroup parent

A recognition that pre-entry liaison could ease the transition for children from the pre-five setting into the school was voiced by staff and parents. For example;

> *There is a need for continuity of experience of the children into school. Teachers from school have to work with us preparing children for school in terms of pre-reading, pre-writing and pre-maths skills.*
>
> Day nursery officer in charge

> *Here [i.e. in the photograph] children are learning about numbers, which they should be aware of. Pre-five centres shouldn't do this separately from primary schools: it should be co-ordinated.*
>
> Private nursery parent

While there was some evidence of co-ordination and liaison between primary schools and pre-five providers some centres, including a nursery school and day nursery, mentioned a lack of interest on the part of primary schools to co-ordinated working and a resistance to pre-five centres introducing aspects of formal learning to the curriculum. Playgroups in particular were generally discouraged, and this could apply even to attempts to familiarise the children with organisational aspects of the school experience:

> *With the rising 5's group we try to work with the local school. The [primary school] teacher has asked that the children be able to dress themselves and fasten laces. We are asked not to pursue school work since we are not trained. There is no sharing of the curriculum; schools are very negative about this. We suggested the group could set out tables like school lunches to give children experience of this, but the school were very negative. They do not like us to encourage writing but we can teach the children pencil control. We would like to see more involvement with the schools.*
>
> Playgroup playleaders

Facilitating learning

The child-centred approach

A number of staff spontaneously described their approach to the children in their care as 'child centred'. Others, without using this particular term, nonetheless described an approach incorporating sensitivity to the individual child's needs and recognition of the value of allowing children to proceed at their own pace, and to have an input in deciding what to do and for how long to do it. A child-centred approach is a compromise of balanced implementation, so that children are not anarchic but learning to follow their own interests at their own pace within the constraints of a social group. The following quotes are representative:

> *Children are given choices to make decisions. They are making their own way and exploring. It is good if children come to activities of their own volition, although there is also a place for an adult bringing children to an activity.*
>
> Day nursery officer in charge

> *We are child-centred: children are evolving and developing and being nurtured at their own speed.*
>
> Nursery school headteacher

Staff and parents perceived that they had an important role in the child's learning process and to this end many responses made reference to the need for structure and guidance. In the case of staff, it was generally apparent that they perceived themselves to be in a dynamic situation, where allowing children opportunities to make choices about activities had to be reconciled with the recognition that they had skills and knowledge which could help fulfil an activity's learning potential. As a result, holding back by being 'on hand' for when the child might choose to seek adult help or interaction had to be balanced with intervention at appropriate stages to help maximise benefits.

Activities and practices

Many of the staff and parents interviewed discussed activities, materials and practices in terms of whether and how they facilitate children's learning, placing the photographic examples in the context of preferences and practices in their own centres. In general terms, pre-five centres were felt to play an important role in providing children with hands on experience of activities and materials in a safe environment.

Staff generally assessed activities such as painting, music, and reading as preferable to watching television (all were illustrated in the photographs). For example, several staff endorsed finger painting, which they saw as allowing the children to explore, feeling the textures, being messy and creative, and they recognised that children should be permitted to 'do their own thing' with such material. Generally the use of television was regarded as suitable for short periods or for specific programmes with some kind of educational aim. Several staff spoke of the benefits of cooking activities involving children, often stressing the potential multicultural links in using varied materials.

Puzzles and jigsaws were very popular, and staff recommended using games which encouraged turn taking and negotiation among the children.

> *This is similar to our own group time: using games to teach about colour, taking turns, sequencing, patience, and socialising.*
>
> Nursery school nursery nurse

The need to be sensitive to each child's stage of development in the materials provided and how they are used was emphasised. For example, some informants felt that the children

in one photograph looked too young for the puzzles, or that the puzzles looked too difficult for the children. A photograph of a small group of children and an adult round a table with various materials on it raised very different opinions on the suitability of the material:

There is a good assortment of materials on the table.

Partnership nursery nurse

There are too many things on the table.

Day nursery nurse

There are too many different things on the table, although the staff member gives the impression that she may be using them in a linking theme.

Partnership nursery nurse

In terms of practice, staff stressed the importance of engaging children in activities, and demonstrating activities for them. It was also felt that working in groups was beneficial, since children learned through watching each other, and developed their language and conversation skills.

Among parents, the major themes emerging included the importance of children participating in activities. Equally, it was felt to be important that activities were fun, giving children time to experiment and be messy. Messy play was mentioned often, with parents usually commenting that this was something they were more happy to see taking place in the pre-five setting than at home (for obvious reasons). A few of the parents mentioned that group work with the children was important and recognised that children learn from each other.

Some parents advocated the use of reading materials, musical instruments, and educational videos. There were also comments about the perceived inappropriateness of certain activities, in particular watching television, which some (but by no means all) parents felt to be more appropriate for home use. Others, like staff, believed television to be suitable for short periods or for specific programmes with some kind of educational aim.

Many of the parents' comments indicated a high degree of understanding about the learning potential of specific activities. The following quotes highlight the knowledge some had concerning the complexities of child development, and how it can be facilitated by different activities and materials.

Finger painting teaches co-ordination and textures and is fun.

Nursery school parent

Through music, children get the chance to express themselves, and to develop language and memory. In the photograph [showing children around a piano] there appears to be an element of negotiation taking place.

Community nursery parent

Books are very important, through reading for pleasure children develop language for school. Having a range of materials is important. Children develop their listening skills and describe pictures which develops their language. The books in the nursery can complement what goes on at home. In this nursery it is probably difficult to find the time to do one to one interaction.

Day nursery parent

Jigsaws are good, providing the opportunity for developing hand eye co-ordination, concentration, and pre-maths skills. They can be a social experience as well.

Day nursery parent

There was also some reference to the value of activities which promote discussion. For example;

> *This looks good, with the children interested and probably discussing shape and colour and materials.*
>
> Playgroup parent

Comments from staff and parents also provided an indication as to what they perceived as evidence of learning and cognitive thinking. Children who looked engrossed and interested, who were using a lot of language, or who had learned stories by heart were cited as offering evidence of the learning process. For example;

> *In this photograph the children are concentrating. Children take in far more than you may imagine.*
>
> Playgroup parent

The context of learning

The situations represented in the photographs reflected different contexts for learning: the features which informants identified as important were relationships, the environment, diversity, and the ethos of centres.

Relationships

Many of the comments made during the viewing of the photographs related to relationships between staff and parents, between staff and the children in their care, and among the children. Staff and parents from all provision types recognised the importance of good relationships, which were viewed by many as a key element of quality in pre-five settings. Interviewees often went on to state their perceptions of the characteristics of good relationships, and the ways in which children and adults benefit from such.

As a community nursery officer in charge pointed out in response to a photograph of a child and adult with a book in soft, cosy surroundings, good relationships between staff and children were important to the learning process.

> *Love and care is an important element of our work. Using books is one way to build this relationship. Children have to be motivated to learn. Books should be relevant to the home experience and help provide a way of communicating. From this, thinking and predicting follows.*

The overwhelming majority of staff and parents who commented, perceived personal attention for children in a one to one situation such as this as highly desirable, stressing the potential of such situations for 'quality time' with the children. While individual attention was generally thought to be beneficial for all children, it was recognised that it could have particular advantages for working with quiet or withdrawn children, or children who had experienced difficult relationships or upsets. It was also felt to 'facilitate learning'. However, while staff and parents valued the quality that individual attention could offer, they also recognised that existing staffing levels often meant that the potential for one to one interactions was severely limited if the other children were not to be neglected. Thus, while one to one situations might be highly desirable, staff and parents recognised that it was more realistic for staff to work with groups of children. (Information on the social context of observed children's activities in terms of whether and how many staff and other children were present is given in Chapter 7.) Small group interactions were preferred: as one partnership nursery teacher put it:

> *Small group discussions provide great opportunities for talking and sharing with your assigned children."*

In response to various photographs, a number of parents expressed the idea that interaction between staff and children around the children's activities was beneficial to children, and that to this end it was good to see staff participating in activities along with children as opposed to standing back supervising.

Both staff and parents frequently made reference to the benefits arising from interaction among the children, recognising that children learn from each other and that socialisation and co-operation between children are good for language development.

In terms of staff inter-relationships, several staff members pointed out that it was important for staff to get on well together, since friction between them could easily be recognised by the children. Holding regular staff meetings to talk over problems was one way of helping avoid relationship difficulties among staff. In several local authority centres there was mention of the importance of working as a team in a democratic fashion in which the contributions of all staff members were welcomed and valued.

Relationships between staff and parents were often said to be very good, with parents tending to describe staff as approachable people with whom they could discuss problems. As a local authority nursery nurse pointed out, some parents had bad memories of their own school experiences which the nursery had to 'work to bridge'. And a day nursery officer in charge also stressed the importance of staff attempting to view the situation from a parent's point of view.

> *It is vital to have good staff parent relations. Staff can often feel threatened by informality. You have to understand the parents' situation and life. For some parents, staff are often close friends - staff may not always realise this. Parents are more comfortable when on first name terms.*

It seems that staff/parent relationships in many centres were characterised by a degree of informality between staff and parent, with mutual respect. As one day nursery nurse pointed out, having good relationships with parents could be helpful from a number of standpoints:

> *Relationships, if good, allow one to tackle tricky situations. Group time means I can build relations with certain parents. This is good for the child, who will then tell you more and ask you more.*

Having a low rate of low staff turnover was often mentioned as facilitating the development of good staff parent relationships. And in the case of playgroups, the central involvement of parents in the running of the groups and the fact that playleaders currently are, or started out as, parents of attending children was felt to help them 'see both sides of the coin'.

The section on 'Parental involvement' under the heading 'The centre and the community' also has a bearing on relationships between parents and staff, while the role of the interaction between staff and children in promoting learning is further discussed under 'Organisation and structure of play'.

The environment

The photographs stimulated a wide range of comments relating to various aspects of the physical environment in a pre-five centre. In general terms, careful physical planning and variety were advocated as leading to stimulation for the children, and it was felt that the environment should be bright, colourful, and appropriate to the different ages and stages of children using it.

Resources and facilities

Many of the photographs in the selection elicited comments about the equipment and resources shown vis-a-vis preferences and practices in the study centres.

Several staff mentioned additional resources which they would like to have available, including a 'green area', a gym, an outdoor area, a piano, and a music practitioner.

In terms of the physical layout and size of the premises, the potential for flexibility was felt to be desirable, it being important to have small quiet and comfortable areas where, for example, one to one interactions between staff and children could take place, as well as the space to develop group activities and large motor play. Some staff pointed out that the organisation of the physical environment had to be appropriate to the particular stage of the child. For example, the use of tables and chairs with older children helped introduce more structure into an activity.

Both staff and parents referred to restrictions on the environment which were physical in origin. For example, a day nursery nurse pointed out that although the small centre in which she worked looked homely and cosy, the lack of space restricted the range of activities which could take place. And some staff said that the numbers of children permitted at certain areas or activities were limited or restricted to certain times of the day because of restrictions on space, such as having only one playroom. In the case of playgroups, several playleaders mentioned the inability to develop themes over longer periods since a multi-use venue meant that all materials and activities had to be returned to storage at the end of sessions.

There were, however, a number staff and parents who praised the facilities and resources available. For example;

> *Our centre is nice and bright compared to other centres. It is spacious and open with room to run about. We have a garden as well.*
>
> Private nursery nurse

> *We have a good environment here, adding more resources as time goes on. We got a computer at Christmas. Children use the environment to explore their senses - touch, smell etc. There are a lot more activities here now than in the past. The children look forward to coming here.*
>
> Day nursery parent

Safety and comfort

A key feature of pre-five care has to be children's safety. Two photographs in particular elicited comments on safety in the pre-five setting. One was of a small group of children and an adult watching television: the other showed a group of children and two adults involved in a cooking activity.

In the case of the photograph of children watching television, perceived safety issues related to the positioning of the television on top of a bookcase. For example, a private nursery headteacher pointed out that children might pull at the cloth on which the television sat, or attempt to climb on to the bookcase. It was also felt that the television was placed too high up and that the children were sitting too close to it.

In response to a photograph showing cookery, a nursery nurse in a day nursery said that she would have some questions about the safety of the cooker and its position, while other staff pointed out that having more than one adult around this activity was important.

These points were echoed by parents. Furthermore, two parents expressed some concern about male involvement in the care of children under five from the point of view of safety.

Other more general comments on safety and comfort in the pre-five environment were made and several staff members also mentioned the importance of settings being bright, clean, and comfortable. For example;

The safety angle is very important for parents.

Playgroup parent

It is important to have a stimulating environment where the equipment is good condition.

Nursery school headteacher

For both staff and parents, comfort was represented by soft, quiet, and intimate 'home like' surroundings which were seen as beneficial for the children. For example;

I like the nice quiet and comfy surroundings in the photograph, which gives the impression of being very inviting.

Partnership nursery nurse

We provide children with a varied and relaxed situation. Many of the children have stressful home situations. Children get time, resources and early education here in a happy and comfy environment.

Nursery school nursery nurse

Organisation and structure of play

A number of observations related to the organisation of play in terms of helping the children get the most from the activities.

Several comments from staff and parents related to the amount and layout of the space available to the group, making it clear that groups should not be cluttered or cramped for space. Numbers of children might also have to be controlled for other reasons; for example, in relation to a photograph containing children at a piano:

This would be a nightmare, there are too many children at the one loud instrument. I'm not in favour of children being left to go berserk.

Nursery school teacher

Piano sessions should be supervised, so children don't push.

Private nursery officer in charge

Both of these comments were fairly typical of a number of staff who expressed the idea that maintaining control of the children's behaviour has an effect on whether and how the children are consequently allowed to take part in certain activities. A number of staff suggested that activities such as the use of a piano would most likely be used as part of a structured session, involving a limited number of children with an adult present. Staff often identified their role in such a group as important in turning a noisy play session into one that was cognitively significant for children. In such groups the adult role was to 'provide direction', 'control behaviour', 'encourage language and interaction' and 'respond to the children' as required. One nursery nurse suggested that by using seats for the children in a group, a degree of structure was being introduced which would help keep the children interested in the activity.

Again, staff mentioned the need to ensure that children receive activities and stimulus compatible with their age and stage of development; the same resources could be used in different ways with different groups of children.

Many responses to the photographs related to the number of children in the groups shown: the size of the group was felt to be an influence on the cognitive potential of the activity concerned. Parents often felt that was that there were too many children in the groups or too many at one activity. Comments like these were in several cases allied to fears about lack of structure resulting in a detrimental effect on the children's learning, for example;

> *There are too many children [photo of group of children a piano] and no learning here. There is a lack of structure, although they are socialising. Here [in this pre-five setting] we have musical instruments which are used in a structured fashion [with adult presence].*
>
> Private nursery parent

The role of interaction among children and between staff and children in promoting learning has been discussed above under the heading 'Relationships'. A few additional comments are relevant in this context. The adult role was seen to be fairly crucial in lifting play to the level of learning. The consensus was that staff should facilitate and take part in activities, promoting the children's own involvement. Interestingly there were only a few comments suggesting that it was important for children to do things for themselves in groups without the presence of an adult. This was especially true of parents, who tended to view the structure that an adult could bring to situations with children as desirable. However a few positive comments were made regarding children being allowed to find themselves in adult free situations, with an element of free play as well as structured play felt to be important:

> *Free play and choice should be part of the day - here it is usually in the morning. It stimulates children's imagination and helps them socialise.*
>
> Private nursery officer in charge

Ethos

Staff and parents often made unprompted comments on viewing the photographs about the ethos of the provision that they were involved in. On other occasions, the researcher prompted by asking about the message that staff tried to convey about the centre and the nature of the preferred ethos. What kind of feelings should a visitor get on entering the centre? On this there were many similar responses from staff and parents across the different provision types, endorsing the following:

- A welcoming and friendly atmosphere in which people feel comfortable
- Happiness among staff and children (as one nursery headteacher pointed out, when people are happy they work better)
- A setting that is cosy and home like
- A place where all people are valued

Diversity

Male involvement

One of the photographs used in the interviews was of several groups of children and adults seated round work tables: one of these adults was a man. The presence of the man in the photo often triggered informants to make comments about male involvement in their nurseries and the rationale for such involvement.

It was fairly common for informants to point out that men had a presence in their particular centre either as staff members or as involved parents. However there is no doubt that men were very much in the minority.

Although, as mentioned earlier, there was a little concern expressed about men in pre-five settings in relation to children's safety, both staff and parents generally tended to view male involvement positively. It was felt that the presence of male staff in pre-five settings challenged traditional stereotypical ideas of male roles, while enhancing the children's range of experience, particularly in the case of children living in all female households.

> *It is important to have more male child care workers. Since children are often in female environments they may be frightened of men. To begin with it is exciting for the children. It is good to see men in this kind of role looking after children, and it may be of extra benefit for single parent families.*
>
> Day nursery childcare worker

In this context, it is relevant to note that in Strathclyde Region, which accounts for 84% of pre-five's in the project's research area, around two in ten households which have pre-five children resident are lone parent households; in the overwhelming majority of such households, the adult concerned is female (source: 1991 Census).

Furthermore, it was pointed out that male involvement could encourage fathers not to view their child's pre-five centre as an all female preserve.

> *Men's input is always desirable, especially with so many children from split families, and it may help give confidence for fathers to come into the centre.*
>
> Day nursery childcare officer

> *We did have one male in the playgroup. Men have to be fairly outgoing to venture here.*
>
> Playgroup parent

There was some awareness that low pay constituted a barrier to more widespread employment of male staff in pre-five settings.

Cultural diversity

Some of the photographs featured elements reflecting today's pluralistic society, such as the presence in the centre of children and adults from different ethnic backgrounds, and the activity of cooking in a wok. These elicited some examples of particular centres' practices in relation to activities, materials and curriculum pertinent to different ethnic groups. A number of comments referred to celebrating various festivals, for example the Chinese New Year.

> *Material and books are important. We have music time with different ethnic songs and languages, festivals, artefacts, and costumes.*
>
> Nursery school teacher

However, two parents did comment that there was little in the way of a multicultural curriculum in the centre or group that they attended, although a number of parental comments were made concerning the positive value of multicultural education, for example:

> *A lot of kids do not get much in the way of multicultural experience. Using multicultural books and toys helps remove the stigma from this race thing.*
>
> Nursery school parent

One member of staff did assert a preference for emphasising the majority culture, albeit obliquely.

> *I use multicultural materials in dressing up, but a child centred approach is not likely to bring it up. Traditions are important. There is plenty in our culture that is neglected and can be taken up.*
>
> Nursery school teacher

However, opinion among both parents and staff varied as to the relevance of a multicultural perspective in relatively homogeneous (all white) communities, highlighting varying attitudes towards awareness raising. Some, such as the parent quoted above, felt that it is particularly important to raise awareness of multicultural issues in communities which are not mixed, but a few felt that multiculturalism should be ignored as unnecessary in these circumstances.

Integration of children with special needs

One of the photographs included a child with apparent physical difficulties. This elicited much comment on the theme of integration, which was overwhelmingly endorsed by parents and staff as benefiting both children with and those without special needs, and encouraging all children to accept each others' differences. For the majority of informants, integration encouraged children to respect each other and become more aware of their individual differences.

However, a few people did raise resource and training issues in relation to special needs. Among staff, pre-service training for working with special needs was felt to be inadequate, and therefore inservice training was identified as a pre-requisite for integration. Both staff and parents perceived a need for extra staff to be employed to cope with children with special needs within integrated provision.

Probably as a result of the method used, which did not entail specific probing on this issue, provision for children with special needs tended to be discussed by staff and parents in general terms without exploring the varying impact of the diversity of factors (eg diet, disability, behaviour) which can lead to a child having special needs. The need for centres to be accessible to disabled children was mentioned only once:

There are no ramps for wheelchairs - the whole school is inaccessible.

Nursery school parent

■ Recording and evaluation

Staff were asked about procedures and practice in relation to record keeping: a fairly complex picture emerged. The responses demonstrated a wide range of practices regarding the amount of information kept and the reasons for recording information and access to the records. Records could be used to appraise staff, parents, primary schools, and other professionals of the child's progress, and sometimes played a part in evaluation of the activities of the centre. Sometimes records were primarily intended to ensure appropriate daily care.

Most playgroups kept only a register with names and addresses of attenders and their parents, although one playgroup did mention keeping records of children's medical conditions and food requirements and another was about to implement a process of keeping profiles linked to a 'pilot scheme of pre-school groups'. Such records as were kept by private nurseries tended to contain only basic information such as emergency contacts and details relating to the child's health. One private nursery kept a diary for the information of babies' parents, but stopped this practice when the child reached the toddler stage: a different sort of record keeping began in the pre-school year, with a record of the child's work provided to parents. A parent whose children attended a private nursery said that she would like more information about the activities they engaged in and felt that 'feedback could perhaps be arranged occasionally'. Some of the playgroups and private nurseries which did keep more than a basic register were at pains to point out that it was

important not to make something 'heavy' out of the records, which should be low key in emphasis and open to parents whenever possible.

Most, but not all, local authority nursery schools kept records containing information about the child's progress on activities and development. These records were often built up on a daily basis through observation of the children. For example:

> *We keep daily records of activities. They contain pertinent comments, notes on health, daily progress and development.*
>
> Nursery school teacher

In a few local authority nurseries something akin to a cognitive profile was built up on the children. By contrast, the headteacher of a nursery school said that it was policy not to keep profiles as 'children should not be labelled too early'. In another, staff mentioned that completion of records by nursery nurses as opposed to teachers was not advocated by the trade union.

In terms of accessibility, most local authority nurseries pointed out that parents had access to the records, which were often produced at parents' nights or regular meetings with parents and used to discuss children's progress. However, some parents did say that records were not kept or that they did not get to see profiles or reports: opinion varied among these parents as to whether or not reports should be kept. Parents might be involved in contributing to the records, although in some instances this was confined to providing information on their child on first attending. One local authority nursery, which did not keep profiles as a matter of routine, kept records relating to children with special needs detailing physical, intellectual, and communication progress: these were made available to other agencies.

In one of the partnership nurseries and in one of the day nurseries mention was made of an assessment procedure carried out at intervals with the children. In the partnership nursery this was in relation to pre-reading and pre-writing skills, while in the day nursery information was recorded under headings such as manipulation, concentration, and development. In both cases, assessment of progress resulted in the child colouring in sections of a picture as they achieved certain skills or levels of achievement. In day nurseries, daily observations of the children were recorded by staff and used to plan for each child. This centre had also used video and voice activated tapes to record activities and provide a record of the children which was used to help in assessment and planning; parents had full access to such recordings. Most day nurseries and partnership nurseries stressed the importance of parents in the recording procedures. One officer in charge likened this to an empowering process where the parent is involved in creating the record and providing an input into it. Something similar occurred in another centre, where parents were involved in discussions, record creation, and strategy formulation with staff. One staff member pointed out that they would not record anything which they could not discuss with the parents.

■ The centre and the community

Accessibility

To complement the information gathered by the survey questionnaire, staff and parents were asked directly about certain accessibility issues: the availability of provision, the distances travelled by carers and children to the centre, and priorities for admittance (the latter being broached with staff only). Issues of access to provision for children with special needs and for fathers are considered in the above section on 'Diversity', and a discussion of 'Parental involvement and support for parents' follows.

Availability of provision

A number of comments on accessibility related to the amount of pre-five provision available and the hours and periods during which service was provided. With this small group of centres the aim was not to produce regional comparisons, but to illuminate some of the issues arising from interviewees' experiences.

Most of those who commented on shortfalls in the level of provision simply raised the issue of supply failing to meet demand in terms of the overall level of pre-five provision. Only one comment related to a perceived shortfall in a specific type of provision:

> *There is not enough pre-school education. The playgroup is just free play, which is not enough. There ought to be at least two nurseries in the locality.*
>
> Playgroup parent

However, given that interviews were with staff who were providing and parents who were receiving some level of service, it is not surprising that the majority of comments on the availability of provision related to the hours and periods of provision supplied. In terms of meeting the needs of children, staff opinion varied as to the optimum hours of provision. For example, two nursery teachers felt that existing hours were sufficient, while a playleader stated a preference for longer hours, particularly with older children. One local authority nursery nurse was quite specific, indicating a need for the children to receive sufficient stimulus, but without allowing them to become tired:

> *Two hours is enough - the young ones are exhausted after that length of time and some of the older ones get bored - it shouldn't be less though.*

Parental opinion also varied as to the optimum hours of provision in terms of meeting children's needs.

> *The hours are long enough for the children. Daycare hours are too long.*
>
> Parent of child attending playgroup

> *The hours are not long enough. All day provision is needed: children get fed up at home.*
>
> Parent of child at nursery school

In terms of meeting parents' needs, there was some recognition on the part of local authority nursery staff that the hours of provision were not suitable for working parents, while staff working in private nurseries and day nurseries highlighted the flexibility of the service provided.

> *We try hard to accommodate all kinds of odd hours and provide an hourly service for some. We never close except for Christmas. I once had a child brought to my home over the Christmas period to allow the parent to work.*
>
> Private nursery headteacher

When considering the views expressed by parents on their requirements it is important to bear in mind that those who were available to take part in the interviews were unlikely to be working full-time. A number of parents using day nurseries and private nurseries mentioned that the extended hours available were important in order to accommodate requirements of work or study. Some parents using facilities with more restricted opening hours did state that the staff attempted to be flexible in meeting their needs in emergency situations or other exceptional circumstances. On the other hand the periods when centres closed, such as the long summer break for nursery schools, could be a problem.

Priorities

The following should be read in the context of the investigation of priorities and conditions for admittance provided by the questionnaire survey (Chapter 4) and from Regional sources (Chapter 10).

Local authority nursery schools' staff stated that priority was given to children in their pre-school year. Age appeared to be seen as a rationing criterion where supply of places could not keep pace with demand, rather than as indicating that nursery school experience was appropriate only to pre-school children.

The day nurseries aimed to cater for the children of adults returning to education and of working parents. Children were also prioritised if referred to the centre: this again would most likely reflect family circumstances. In terms of the characteristics of the children themselves, children with special needs were mentioned as a priority.

One of the partnership nurseries targeted parents living in the local area, and one playgroup gave priority to local children in their pre-school year.

In a couple of cases in Strathclyde Region, mention was made of the recent move to a locally based admissions panel whereby pre-five providers within a given area liaise over admissions priorities.

Distance

Some of the staff and parents took the opportunity to make comments about the location of the centres and the distances that attenders travelled.

The majority of comments made by staff were to the effect that the parents and children using the centres were from the local area. Indeed, as mentioned in the 'Priorities' section above, this can be an important factor in offering a place. However this was not always the case, and travelling from further afield might well indicate scarcity of provision.

> *There is not a catchment area as such due to the lack of provision. We take children from areas outside what would normally be our catchment area.*
>
> Nursery school nursery nurse

> *Some families come from afar, ten (out of 45) are from outside the town.*
>
> Playgroup playleader

There was also some indication that centres which made provision for children with special needs tended to operate a much wider geographical catchment area for such children than for others. This no doubt reflects both the general lack of provision for such children, and their relatively small incidence in the population.

Of the parents, only four commented on the distance to the provision. Two had children attending playgroups, and both suggested that the provision was very local and handy for all its users. The children of the other two were attending private nurseries, and both appeared to travel considerable distances.

In summary, it is apparent that whereas for some people proximity of provision is important, others are able and willing to travel considerable distances to take advantage of pre-five care. Children with special needs may have to travel longer distances for services.

Parental involvement and support for parents

Aspects of parental involvement have been touched on in earlier sections. The section on male involvement (under 'Diversity in centres') described the perceived benefits to fathers and children resulting from their involvement in the pre-five centre and 'Recording and evaluation' also has a bearing on this topic in terms of parents' access to and role in creating records. Aspects of some of the following sections are also relevant. The section on 'Benefits of pre-five provision' makes reference to some of the benefits perceived to result from parental involvement, and the section on discussion 'Use of local resources' refers to the crucial role of parents in providing the necessary level of cover to allow trips and outings.

As might be expected, when staff and parents were asked specifically about parental involvement in the centres responses indicated a great deal of variation, not only in the amount of parental involvement, but also in the nature and purpose of such involvement. Involvement might have any or all of the following purposes:

Providing a practical service, such as:

- 'settling' their child in the centre
- cover for trips
- fund raising
- playing music for the children
- helping to clean and tidy up

Providing an input intrinsic to the child's education and development; and enhancing parenting skills; for example:

- participating in the core activities of the centre
- liaising with staff concerning their child's needs
- carrying out activities at home as a result of involvement in or knowledge of the centre's practices

Helping parents develop as individuals; for example:

- participation in groups run by the pre-five centre, such as classes in keep fit or stress management

The following quotes touch on some of the varied and contrasting ideas expressed by staff about involving parents.

> *We do have some parental involvement in activities but what goes on here is more than what a parent knows or can do. You need a trained person who can maximise the possibilities and explore all the opportunities. Nursery teachers and nursery nurses know what they are about. The untrained eye is of little use.*
>
> Nursery school headteacher

> *We have parental involvement in the nursery on a rota system. Parents know their children so there is a lot we can learn from them. Parental influence on children is so great in terms of education, we have to recognise and work with this.*
>
> Day nursery nurse

> *We have good relationships here and try to be flexible. We are always approachable and have a warm and welcoming atmosphere. We are trying to carry on the work of the parent as the prime educator. Parents are willing to help out and we involve them at a level comfortable for them.*
>
> Day nursery nurse

The vast majority saw parental involvement as a beneficial and important thing, recognising that parents are the first educators of their children and as such represent an important resource for staff. However, both attitudes and practices did vary greatly, particularly in the case of local authority nursery provision. A few of the parents using local authority nursery schools suggested that they were not always kept informed of their child's activities by the centre, and in two cases parents said that there was little or no parental involvement. On the other hand, some local authority nurseries clearly encouraged a high degree of parental participation. In the playgroup situation the involvement of parents on a rota system is vital for the group's existence. For several of the playleaders and parents who responded one of the major difficulties they faced was in getting all parents to take their turn on the rota.

Several providers recognised that involvement in their child's pre-five centre is a daunting prospect for some parents, and that it was therefore important as an initial step to try to get parents involved in activities with which they felt comfortable: for example in baking or keep-fit activities. Equally, it was felt more important to provide parents with the option to get involved rather than to pressurise them, since many parents seeking work or to get some respite could feel harassed by such an approach. For example, one of the partnership nurseries and one of the private nurseries pointed out that since many of their clients were working it was more difficult to organise activities including parents. In respect of such parents, several centres considered communication vital and had adopted newsletter schemes to keep parents informed of the activities and events happening in the centre.

Some mention was made of other barriers to parental involvement. For example, in a couple of local authority nursery schools mention was made of a lack of space for involving parents or running parents groups, and a local authority nursery headteacher pointed out that she found it difficult to communicate with families from minority ethnic groups (presumably because of language differences).

In summary, there were many ways in which parents could and did help in supporting pre-five centres. Their contributions varied according to their personal circumstances and wishes, but were also determined by the centre's willingness for them to be involved and having appropriate facilities to accommodate extra adults.

Community links and resources

Interviewees were asked about the provision's use of resources in the local community, their links with other professionals and community groups, and how such relationships provided ongoing or complementary support for the children. (Links with and work involving primary schools are reported on under 'Broad learning aims'.)

Use of local resources

Most, if not all, of the case study centres made some use of local resources. Among the most commonly reported were visits to local parks, libraries, shops and museums, and several centres said that they utilised the local library services' personnel for storytelling sessions for the children. Staff and parents from all provision types also mentioned visits to, and from, the police and fire services. A couple of the nursery schools, day care providers and a partnership nursery said that they had used a local community education resource centre. Two parents (one from a nursery school and one from a playgroup) mentioned fund-raising with support from local shops.

The following quote from a partnership nursery teacher indicates how extensively local community resources might be used:

> *We use the library a lot: they set out books for us. The local librarian comes in to read stories for us. When we looked at road safety as a theme the police came along and brought one of their dogs. We have links with the local nurseries through the admissions panel and are represented in the link-up group. Our location is handy for the underground and there is a park across the road. We have had the fire brigade out for visits and the local dental nurse.*

Several restraints on use of community resources were specified, the main one being the requirement for sufficient adults to guarantee children's safety on trips outwith the centre. This was particularly true of local authority nurseries, where the most commonly mentioned restraint related to the higher ratio of adults to children demanded for outings, which meant that staff had often to rely on parental support to provide additional cover: one nursery school teacher said that some parents had taken time off work to go on trips with the children. Several staff said that as a result of lack of cover and fears about the safety of children arising either from this, or from other factors such as the proximity of busy roads, the centre did not organise many trips. Interestingly, in full day provision, where parents were more likely to work and to work full time (private nurseries, partnership nurseries, and day nurseries), there was no mention of a lack of cover for outings as a problem and indeed more trips and outings appeared to take place. This suggests that these types of provision may tend to have more staff available.

Two of the day nurseries mentioned a lack of resources in the local community as a restraint. Day nursery provision has traditionally been associated with deprived communities, where the lack of wealth is often accompanied by a lack of both private and public facilities.

Links with other professionals and community groups

Links with the local community and other professionals can serve a variety of purposes. Some relate to supporting the children, particularly those with special educational needs. Others aim to support parents, and links with colleges and universities through student placement are to the benefit of the wider community. It should be noted that the above discussion of 'Recording and Evaluation' includes relevant information regarding wider access to the centres records.

Local authority provision appeared to have most links with other professionals and with community groups. In particular, the interventionist nature of many day nurseries means that they are likely to have more and better organised work with other community agencies, professionals, and groups supporting children and their families. The levels of community involvement and liaison with other agencies appeared much less developed in the case of private providers and playgroups.

Among local authority nurseries, for example, one school mentioned contact with health visitors, social workers, and women's refuge workers, although the headteacher pointed out that such contact was confined to crisis management. Another mentioned work with health visitors and speech therapists and had had WEA speakers in the nursery talking with the parents. This nursery school had also made its premises available for adults on college courses to use and had taken various students, including nursery nurses, paediatric students, YTS students and teaching students. One of the playgroups also mentioned taking student placements.

Regarding day nurseries, one deputy officer in charge listed the centre's links and work as follows;

> *Pre-five centres are key facilities and we hope that other resources will be built around them. We link home with primary and playgroup. We network with other resources and services at all levels. Staff members link with the nursery advisory committee, child protection agencies and the under 8s forum. Childminders use the centre and we are involved in supporting local parents' initiatives. We provide help and information for the local playgroup association. We are involved in various community groups and schemes and help organise transport for local parents on community outings. We liaise and work with psychological services, health visitors, and social workers.*

Other day care facilities specified work with paediatricians, social workers, health visitors, physiotherapists, speech therapists, and occupational therapists. Work with community education was also cited by two of these centres, and the use of mobile crèche facilities in order to facilitate meetings of parent/community groups in the centre was mentioned .

In summary, providers' saw themselves as part of a broader community and able both to draw on its services and facilities, and in some instances to offer something in return.

■ Staff development

All staff interviewees were asked about their own personal development needs and centre heads were also for their views on the development needs of their staff.

Current training and development in local authority provision focused on such areas as child abuse, dealing with AIDS, education management, and effective communication with parents. Both individual and corporate approaches to the provision of training and development were mentioned. In the case of the former, staff were encouraged to pursue their own inservice requirements and to look at the range of options for academic advancement; in the case of the latter centres attempted to formulate a whole unit/staff approach to developing services and staff training. Both approaches might operate concurrently within the same centre. A range of methods of delivery were employed, including input from social work, networking with other establishments, staff meetings, and academic courses.

Among the playgroups and private nurseries, the situation was somewhat different. Whilst both identified areas where training and development were felt to be appropriate, it was clear that they had fewer opportunities to pursue these compared with staff in local authority centres.

Priorities for further training and development were diverse, reflecting different starting points. Among management, two nursery headteachers and an officer in charge of a day nursery spoke of a general need for either staff team building or setting aims and objectives for the provision. Two senior staff members mentioned management or administration skills, and a few others mentioned a requirement for curriculum development mathematics or 'multiculturalism'.

More junior staff tended to pick up on specific areas for development, most commonly a need for training and support in working with children with special needs. Two staff mentioned the need for formal childcare qualifications: one was an unqualified childcare worker, while the other was a teacher with a Bachelor of Education degree who felt the need for a more focused early years qualification. Some playgroup playleaders and rota parents identified a need for more specialised and/or advanced training to be made

available to them beyond the basic playleader course. For example;

> *SPPA courses are very basic and repetitive. They need to provide more advanced courses to allow you to move on and develop.*
>
> Playgroup playleader

There was also some feeling that existing Regional inservice was not entirely appropriate for local authority nursery schools, being geared towards primary rather than specifically nursery education.

Regarding the means of pursuing development and training requirements, a range of options were utilised:

Methods external to the provision:

- membership of professional bodies and associations such as BAECE
- taking part in Regional inservice involving advisers
- pursuing extra qualifications at the individual level
- visiting other pre-five settings

Methods internal to the provision:

- setting performance indicators
- holding staff meetings
- getting staff involved in decision making within the pre-five setting

There was some discussion of resource constraints, particularly by staff in private nurseries, who mentioned the lack of funds available for inservice and other support within their setting.

> *We suffer low pay with even more responsibilities and longer hours than our colleagues in the public services. Extra 'auxiliaries' for special needs are too expensive. Training is doubly expensive as there are course costs and absence cover.*
>
> Private nursery headteacher

In Fife and Borders Regions there were few possibilities for the career advancement of nursery nurses, and several mentioned this as a difficulty. This was not the case in Strathclyde Region where nursery nurses could and did become pre-five centre heads. One of these officers in charge said of her qualification that

> *Having an NNEB helps promote good relations with the staff (I'm one of them).*
>
> Community nursery officer in charge

One playleader also mentioned the lack of a career structure but suggested that this was not particularly important,

> *We are basically mums interested in children. I have no interest in going back to college, and it fits in with my own family situation.*

■ Benefits of pre-five provision

Staff and parents were asked about the benefits to children and parents resulting from children's attendance at the pre-five centre. Responses from staff in the different provision types were very similar although some differences of emphasis did emerge. Staff in all types of provision said that children benefited from the new experiences and activities they encountered and from socialising with their peers and friends. The variety of benefits for children specified are reflected in the following quote from a teacher in a partnership nursery:

> *The benefits for children are good preparation for school, socialising between children and adults, a sense of belonging here. A chance to develop in all ways: outdoors, in early maths skills, reading skills, arts and crafts, interest in books, science, skills from wet play areas, manipulative and motor skills.*

The benefits of links with schools were more likely to be stressed by local authority nursery schools whose staff were most likely to see their provision as having a predominantly educative function. Benefits for parents were felt primarily to accrue from having confidence in the nursery schools' abilities to help their children develop in a safe environment, although the two local authority nurseries providing all day care did mention their longer hours as offering more flexibility than traditional nursery schools in meeting the needs of parents. One nursery school headteacher pointed out that there might be a conflict of needs between children and parents and said that the nursery put the children first and that the needs of parents should be met by other means.

Private nurseries and partnership nurseries were the only providers who referred to allowing parents to work as a major benefit: giving them the opportunity to improve their own and their children's lives. One of the partnership nurseries also pointed out that the costs to parents were low. Cost was recognised as a potential barrier: an officer in charge of a private nursery suggested that some people could benefit from childcare vouchers.

All types of providers considered parents benefited from socialising with other adults, whether parents or staff. This was particularly true of playgroups where parental involvement is central to their operation. One playleader set out this and other aims of the playgroup as follows:

> *This is a place for children to come and make friends and learn to share. Although basically for children, it gives mums the opportunity to make new friends, and gives mums some free time. It is the beginning of education for the children. We are compensating and complementing home activities.*

Some mention was made by all providers of the respite given to parents by even the short periods of childcare, which 'encourages the development of quality time when parent and child are together'. In one day nursery the officer in charge pointed out that children may also need respite from 'the stresses of family life'.

In many cases parents' responses were similar to those of staff, specifying as benefits the new activities and stimulation received by the children. Several parents mentioned that children could play in ways and with materials that they could not at home. Some parents said that they had picked up ideas and activities in the pre-five setting which they could copy or develop at home with their children. There was also some indication by parents using a playgroup and parents using a nursery school that the children would be in an advantageous position when they moved on to school. However the majority of responses from parents stressed the perceived social benefits to the children through attendance at the pre-five group. For example some parents felt that children become more confident and have better developed social skills, which lead to their being more able to take control of their own learning. In terms of the benefits to themselves, among those whose children attended part-time provision there was a greater incidence of specifying respite. However, other positive benefits were mentioned. For example, in one of the partnership nurseries a group of parents pointed out that

> *It gives you freedom and the chance to educate yourself. The hours are long but you can always do with more.*

Summary

Staff and parents were interviewed about their perceptions of quality of provision for pre-fives. The interviews were based on photographs of children in various kinds of pre-five settings and comments therefore tended to focus initially on what was in the pictures although the topics subsequently broadened to incorporate references to the situations and children familiar to staff and parents.

The comments arising from this part of the research provide a rich source of evidence from adults intimately concerned with pre-five provision. The researchers elicited categories from the comments and reported findings under six main headings

Summary of findings

Purpose and content of learning

- Staff considered pre-five centres developed the whole child as an independent, confident and self motivated learner. Many staff and parents saw the development of social and interpersonal skills, whereby children learn how to learn, as their most important contribution to children's preparation for school. Regarding specific skills and abilities, the importance of language development through social interaction was emphasised.
- There was concern among staff in pre-five establishments that downward pressure from the 5–14 curriculum guidelines might result in loss of flexibility. In particular, staff feared that this might threaten their 'child centred' approach to child development.
- Although not the over-riding purpose of pre-five activity, parents and staff felt preparation for school was important and the transition into school could be eased by pre-entry liaison.
- Some of the study centres would have welcomed closer links and co-ordinated working with primary schools. Playgroups felt particularly discouraged from undertaking activities intended to prepare children for school.
- Staff and parents had an important role in structuring and guiding a child's learning process while allowing children to follow their own interests, at their own pace and within the constraints of a social group. Staff were aware that this entailed a balance of their holding back and intervening at appropriate stages to maximise benefits.
- Generally pre-five centres provided children with opportunities to experience a wide range of activities and materials in a safe environment.
- Images of children concentrating or looking interested were cited as evidence of the learning process.

Context of learning

- Many perceived good relationships between children, and between adults and children (especially on a one to one basis) as key elements of quality in pre-five settings.
- Staff and parents from across different provision types had similar views about the appropriate ethos for pre-five settings. They endorsed: a safe environment; a welcoming and friendly atmosphere in which people feel comfortable; happiness among staff and children; a setting that is cosy and home like; a place where all people are valued.

- Providers and parents generally indicated that they felt it both appropriate and valuable to familiarise children with the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of today's society. The research did not seek to systematically investigate practice in this regard, but these discussions with parents as well as the observations of activities in the study centres (reported in Chapter 8) raise questions as to how effective and widespread such practice is.
- Although there was a little concern expressed about men in pre-five settings in relation to children's safety, both staff and parents generally tended to view male involvement positively, feeling that the presence of males in pre-five settings challenges traditional stereotypical ideas of male roles, while enhancing the children's range of experience. Furthermore, the presence of such staff could encourage fathers not to view their child's pre-five centre as an all female preserve. There was some awareness that low pay constitutes a barrier to widespread employment of male staff in pre-five settings.

Recording and evaluation

- Practice varied greatly in terms of the amount of information kept, the reasons for recording the information, and arrangements for access to records. Records were variously used to appraise staff, parents, primary schools, and other professionals of children's progress, and might play a part in evaluation of the centre's activities. Sometimes records were primarily intended to ensure appropriate daily care.

The centre and the community

- There was recognition that supply failed to meet the demand in terms of the overall level of pre-five provision
- Whereas for some people proximity of provision was important, others were able and willing to travel considerable distances to take advantage of pre-five care. Children with special needs may have to travel longer distances for services.
- There were many ways in which parents supported pre-five centres. Contributions varied according to personal circumstances and wishes, but were also determined by the centre's willingness for them to be involved and having appropriate facilities to accommodate extra adults. Several centres noted the necessity of making specific arrangements for communication with working parents, and had adopted newsletter schemes to keep parents informed of activities and events.
- The majority of providers - but by no means all - saw parental involvement as a beneficial and important thing, recognising that parents are the first educators of their children and as such represent an important resource for staff. Many parents indicated a high degree of understanding about the learning potential of specific activities, and demonstrated considerable knowledge concerning the complexities of child development and how it can be facilitated.
- Providers drew on the services and facilities of the local community and in some instances were able to offer facilities and opportunities in return.

Staff development

- All staff informants were able to identify personal needs for training and development. However priorities were diverse – reflecting different starting points – and staff in playgroups and private nurseries had fewer opportunities to pursue further training compared with staff in local authority centres.

Benefits for parents and children

- Staff and parents from all types of provision said that children benefited from the new experiences and activities they encountered, and from socialising with their peers and friends. Nursery school staff were most likely to see their provision as having a predominantly educative function and the benefits being in links with schools.
- Private nurseries and partnership nurseries were the only providers who referred to allowing parents to work or study as a major benefit but all providers thought respite from children and opportunities to socialise with other adults were beneficial to parents and therefore their children.
- Some parents indicated they picked up ideas and activities which they could copy or develop with their children at home.

7 Pre-fives in Action

Introduction

Observation of children in the sixteen study centres was used to give direct information about their experience which, together with the staff observations exercise (see Chapter 8), serves to supplement the indirect information available from interviews and questionnaires. There were two specific aims of the observations. Firstly, they served to illuminate experiences which facilitate coherence in children's learning between the first phases of learning outside the home and the initial stages of compulsory education, as indicated in the 5–14 curriculum guidelines. Secondly, the observations were employed to illuminate aspects of the children's activities which reflect the quality of their experiences in terms of social context and level of involvement in activities.

Details of the method used are provided in Chapter 3 'Methodology' (section 2c 'Child observations'). The observations were carried out with two samples of children:

a) Six 'target' children were randomly selected in each centre.

b) Two 'tracked' children were selected including, where possible, children with special needs.

The intention was to give a more extended and sustained record of the activities of the 'tracked' children, though in less depth than for the 'target' children.

Information recorded covered four aspects of the children's activities:

- the content of the activity the observed child was engaging in;
- the processes involved in this activity;
- the social context;
- the level of the observed child's involvement in activity.

The content and process categories used are listed in Appendix 3.2. They were defined through an iterative process in which reference to Level A targets of the attainment outcomes of the 5–14 Guidelines in terms of language, mathematics, environmental studies, expressive arts, and religious & moral education was related to activities appropriate to pre-school children. Social context was recorded in terms of the number of children and the number of adults involved in the child's activity: the quality of the interactions which took place was not assessed (however, the staff observations exercise, reported in Chapter 8, touches on this). Levels of involvement were recorded using the Leuven Involvement Scale (described in Chapter 3 'Methodology).

It should be noted that no attempt had been made to assess the appropriateness of the observed activities or contexts to the particular needs of the children in the sample.

For ease of reference when discussing findings by centre type, nursery schools and classes are referred to as 'nursery schools'; and day nurseries, family centres, and community nurseries are referred to collectively as 'day nurseries'.

Observation of 'target' children

Introduction

The total number of 'target' children observed was 96. Each child was observed for two periods of six minutes, with one hour between. Within each six minute period, information was recorded in respect of three two minute observation periods, giving a total of 576 recorded observations for this group. A summary of the data collected during the target child observations is given in Appendix 7.1.

The number of children in each type of provision is broken down by age and given in Table 7.1 below. Percentages are not given as these are almost identical to the numbers (the total number of target children being around one hundred)

Table 7.1: *Number of target children by type of centre and age*

Ages	Nursery school	Day nursery	Private nursery	Partner-ship nursery	Playgroup	Total
two	0	0	0	3	0	3
three	3	7	4	6	3	23
four	19	11	7	3	21	61
five or older	7	0	1	0	0	8
Unknown (excluded from mean)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total number of target children	30	18	12	12	24	96
Mean age in Years	4.2	3.6	3.8	3.0	3.9	3.8

The average (mean) age for all target children was 3.8 years. The youngest children were found in the partnership nurseries where the mean age was 3 years. The oldest children were found in the nursery schools with a mean age of 4.2 years.

Content Areas

Of the 576 time segments observed, over one third (221 segments: 38%) did not include activities directly related to the 5-14 development programme in terms of the derived content areas (listed in Appendix 3.2). Table 7.2 below relates to the 62% of time segments which did include such activities and categorises these according to how frequently they were observed. The four most frequently observed content areas were: paints, crayons, felt tips, and chalk; preparing and/or eating food; story or poem read aloud; and materials for construction. Five areas were not observed.

Table 7.2: *Ranking of Content areas (% of all Target Child observations)*

Most frequent (≥5%)	*Less frequent (<1%<5%)*	*Not observed*
Paints, crayons, felt tips (18%)	Wheeled toys	Bulbs and batteries
Food, preparation and eating (15%)	People in their lives	Clockwork toys
Story or poem read aloud (12%)	Dolls. puppets	Time, day, date
Construction (11%)	Materials for investigation	Festivals
Books and pictures (9%)	Direction/rule based games	Money etc.
Water (8%)	Weather and sky	
Sand (7%)	Living things	
	Musical instruments	
	Flowers, fruit, vegetables	

Process areas

Of the 576 time segments observed, 12% (69 segments) did not include activities directly related to the 5-14 development programme as encapsulated in the derived process areas (listed in Appendix 3.2). Table 7.3 below relates to the 88% of time segments which did include such activities and categorises these according to how frequently they were observed. The four most frequently observed process areas were: observing; describing; drawing, painting, modelling or printing; and asking questions.

Table 7.3: *Ranking of Process areas (% of all Target Child observations)*

Most frequent (≥5%)	*Less frequent (<5%)*	*Least frequent (<1%)*
Observing (30%)	Experimenting	Caring for living things
Describing (9%)	Sorting by shape	Using dolls or puppets to communicate
Drawing, painting, modelling (7%)	Singing	Grouping, eg colours
Asking questions (6%)	Tidying up	Counting
Suggesting reasons (5%)	Building and construction	Writing
Talking about personal experiences (5%)	Gross body movement	
Role play, dressing up (5%)	Looking at books and pictures	
	Physical activity with smaller equipment	
	Responding to story/poem	
	Repeating and imitating movements	
	Measuring and stacking	
	Making and attending to sound	
	Dancing or moving to music	

Social context

Table 7.4 shows findings on the social context which the target children experienced vis-a-vis other children and adults.

Table 7.4: *Social context of observed activities: percentage of observation periods (target children)*

	Adults present	Nursery school	Day nursery	Private nursery	Partnership nursery	Playgroup	All centres
Child alone	No	15	9	9	21	17	14
	Yes	3	11	0	4	1	4
Child in pair with one other child	No	17	7	2	10	10	1
	Yes	5	5	2	1	2	3
Child in small group (2-4 others)	No	20	15	9	20	16	17
	Yes	9	38	43	21	21	23
Child in large group (5+ others but not all)	No	5	0	3	0	4	3
	Yes	11	1	3	0	1	4
Child with whole class	No	0	2	6	0	4	2
	Yes	16	13	24	23	24	20
Number of observation periods		177	105	67	71	140	560

Note: Social context could not be coded for 16 observation periods (3%).

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It can be seen that in 40% of the observations the target children were engaged in small group activities with between two and four other children, either with or without one or more adults. The former was the most frequently observed social situation in day and private nurseries. However, in the nursery schools a small group with an adult pertained to only 9% of observations, and the single most commonly observed context was child in small group without adults, suggesting a higher degree of independence. It is possible that this result could be linked to the relatively older age of the target children in nursery schools (see Table 7.1). The most frequently observed social context in partnership nurseries and playgroups was for the target child to be involved in activities along with the whole class and at least one adult. The one-to-one relationship between a child and an adult is often perceived as desirable: this type of social context was most likely to be observed in day nurseries, with 11% of observations fitting this category.

Focusing solely on how adults formed the context for the target children's experiences, the data in Table 7.5 shows that children in nursery schools, partnership nurseries and playgroups spent just over half of all observation periods in activities which did not involve adults. This was less likely in the case of day nurseries and private nurseries, but still pertained to a sizeable minority of observations.

Table 7.5: *Number of adults involved: percentage of observation periods (target children)*

	Nursery school	Day nursery	Private nursery	Partnership nursery	Playgroup	Total
No adults	57	32	28	51	51	47
One adult	33	61	38	32	36	40
Two or more adults	10	7	34	17	13	14
Number of observation periods	177	105	68	71	140	561

Note: Social context could not be coded for 15 observation periods (3% of 576).

Involvement level

The Leuven Scale defines five levels of involvement ranging from daydreaming to intense activity. The data in Table 7.6 suggests that children in nursery schools and playgroups tend to experience the highest levels of involvement, with nearly half of all coded observations indicating involvement at above the routine level. It is quite possible that this result might relate to age of children and length of sessions, as nursery schools and playgroups tend to operate shorter sessions for older children. The lowest involvement levels were recorded in respect of private nurseries.

Table 7.6: *Children's involvement levels: percentage of observation periods (target children)*

		Nursery school	Day nursery	Private nursery	Partnership nursery	Playgroup	Total
1	Resting, day-dreaming	2	1	14	13	0	5
2	Partly engaged, little progress in activity, easily distracted	20	36	32	13	24	24
3	Activity at routine level, distractible	34	29	21	46	28	32
4	Intense moments, degree of perseverance	34	20	27	22	32	29
5	Intense activity, concentration most of the time	10	14	5	6	11	10
Number of observation periods		203	69	56	69	133	530

Note: Involvement level could not be coded for 46 observation periods (8% of 576).

Focusing on the data for the highest involvement levels (i.e. 4 and 5), it emerges that the young children observed spent considerable periods closely engaged in activities: around four in ten observations included this sort of intense involvement. However, while the concentration and perseverance associated with these higher levels of involvement are important, this is not to say that children should engage solely in such activities. There is a need for opportunities for day dreaming too, which did not appear to be present in the observed playgroups.

Involvement levels were also examined in relation to the number of adults present, but no clear relationships emerged.

■ Observations of 'tracked' children

Introduction

The total number of tracked children observed was 31. Observations were recorded in respect of six two-minute observation periods for each child, giving a total of 186 observation periods. An eight minute interval elapsed between observation periods. Thus these observations were spread over a similar period to the target child observations (around an hour), but sampled the activity in this time though shorter but more frequent periods of observation.

Eight of the 31 tracked children were selected because they had been identified by staff as having special needs. This group comprised four children with Down's syndrome and one child with each of the following: emotional and behavioural difficulties, cystic fibrosis, cerebral palsy, and retarded development. Table 7.7 shows the number of children taking part in this element of the research, by centre type. It can be seen that six of the eight children with special needs were attending nursery schools.

Table 7.7: *Number of tracked children and children with special needs by centre type*

	Nursery school	Day nursery	Private nursery	Partnership nursery	Playgroup	Total
Tracked	4	6	3	2	8	23
Special needs	6	0	1	1	0	8

Findings from this part of the observations are presented on the basis of a comparison between the children with special needs and the other tracked children. These groups will be referred to as 'special needs' children, and 'tracked' children.

Because the tracked observations were spaced more regularly throughout the period of observation than for the 'target' children it was expected that a greater range of content areas would be found in this group. However, it might be expected that this group would be rather less homogeneous in its needs due to the inclusion of children with special needs (who were excluded from the target group), which means that assumptions about what is appropriate for the group as a whole may not be valid when applied to individual cases. For example, our sample included both children with Cerebral Palsy and Down's Syndrome, and they had very different needs in terms of the activities they were engaged in and adult involvement therein.

A major purpose was to investigate the extent to which these children had similar or different experiences to the other tracked children and if they differed, how. This posed considerable problems in terms of the analysis of the data, because even within the group of children with special needs, the individual circumstances vary so much that any comparisons would be tentative. We emphasise that the data in this section should be considered with these reservations in mind.

Content areas

In all, twelve different activity content areas (of a possible 21) were observed for the group as a whole. Nine activities were not observed among the tracked group, and a further four were not observed among the special needs group. However, as there were considerably fewer children in the latter group this is to be expected. Table 7.8 gives the rank order of the four most frequently observed content areas for each group. It can be seen that the three most commonly recorded activities for tracked children (paints, food, and stories) were also popular among the special needs group.

Table 7.8: *Rank order of most frequently observed content areas for tarcked and special needs children with percentage of observations*

	Tracked Children		Special Needs Children	
Content area	rank	%	rank	%
Paints, crayons, felt tips, etc.	1	24	4	9
Food - preparing & eating	2	16	3	18
Story or poem read aloud	3	13	2	21
Books and pictures	-	-	1	30
Sand	4	10	-	-

Process areas

The processes noted in relation to in the observed activities were analysed in the form of simple rankings as for the content areas. In all, 21 different process areas (of a possible 25) were recorded during observations for the tracked sample as a whole. Table 7.9 gives the rank order of the four most frequently observed process areas for each group.

Table 7.9: *Ranking of most frequently observed process areas for tracked and special needs children with percent age of observations*

Process area	Tracked Children rank	%	Special Needs Children rank	%
Observing	1	26	1	30
Drawing, painting, modelling, printing	2	12		
Describing	3	7		
Looking at books			2	17
Talking about a personal experience/feeling	4.5	6		
Suggesting reasons	4.5	6		
Gross movement of the body			4	6
Tidying up			3	13

It can be seen that the most commonly recorded process area (observing) was common to both groups. However there are differences, which may reflect the special needs represented. For example, some of the children with special needs were engaged in physio-therapeutic activities, which explains the high ranking of gross bodily movements. One could speculate that 'tidying up' is an activity that children of a great variety of abilities can take part in. However, as noted in the introduction, the data does not in itself amount to an appraisal of the appropriateness of the observed content and processes areas to these children.

Social context

Similar comments to those just made apply to the analysis of the social groupings in which the tracked children were found, since the data illustrates what was observed and does not incorporate an assessment of the appropriateness of a given grouping for the particular children involved. The tracked children were most frequently observed in small groups (39% of observations) whereas the children with special needs were most often found without other children (50% of observations). This would seem to indicate a difference between these two groups, although with the small numbers involved in the special needs group a chance association cannot be ruled out. However, we don't know how appropriate these groupings were for either group of children, and we cannot tell if the 50% of observations applies to all children with special needs spending half their time alone or to about half of them spending all their time alone. The remaining 50% of observations of children with special needs were split equally between small groups and whole class activities. This reflects the pattern observed in the nursery schools, where six of the eight special needs children were observed (these children constitute a majority of all tracked and special needs children observed in nursery schools, as Table 7.7 shows).

Children with special needs were less frequently observed in activities that did not include adults (34% as opposed to 46% for tracked children). Due to the small number of children involved in this part of the analysis, cross tabulations of social involvement in terms of both adults and other children and were not feasible.

Involvement

It was found that the tracked children including those with special needs, were fairly highly involved in their activities, as Table 7.10 shows.

Table 7.10: *Children's involvement levels: percentage of observation periods (tracked children)*

	Tracked	Special needs	Total
1 Resting, daydreaming	7	3	6
2 Part engaged, little progress in activity, easily distracted	31	16	28
3 Activity at routine level, distractible	34	38	35
4 Intense moments, degree of perseverance	21	28	22
5 Intense activity, concentration most of the time	7	16	9
Number of observation periods	121	32	153

Note: Involvement level could not be coded for 33 observation periods (18% of 186).

The children with special needs were found to operate at the above routine level in 44% of the observations whereas the tracked children were found to operate at these levels in 28% of the observed intervals. In particular, the small group of special needs children were twice as likely as the other children to be intensely involved.

■ Summary

Observations of 96 children from two to six years old (61% of children were four years) monitored the activities and the content areas mostly occupying children and their level of involvement in their activities.

These observations yielded considerable quantitative data but the extent to which it can form the basis for generalisations is limited by the way that study centres were selected. A further difficulty in interpreting results is that the differences between types of provision could be related to the age of children rather than to variations in the kind of environment and support provided. Researchers therefore take these findings as indicative; for more generalisable comparison, it would be necessary to carry out the observation exercise with a larger group of children

Summary of findings

Activities were analysed in terms of content and process categories defined with reference to Level A targets of the attainment outcomes of the 5–14 Guidelines in terms of language, mathematics, environmental studies, expressive arts, and religious & moral education. The four most frequently observed content areas were: paints, crayons, felt tips, and chalk; preparing and/or eating food; story or poem read aloud; materials for construction. The four most frequently observed process areas were: observing; describing; drawing, painting, modelling or printing; and asking questions. Over one third of the observed time

segments (38%) did not include activities related to the 5-14 development programme in terms of the derived content areas, while 12% fell outside the schema in terms of process areas.

The most common social context was a group of 3-5 children (including the target child): this applied to 40% of observation periods. Children in nursery schools, partnership nurseries and playgroups spent just over half of all observation periods in activities which did not involve adults, while a one-to-one setting between the target child and an adult was most likely to be observed in day nurseries, with 11% of observations fitting this social context.

Involvement levels varied between types of provision, with the highest levels found in nursery school and playgroup centres and the lowest levels in the private nurseries. It is quite possible that this result might relate to the age of the children and length of sessions, as nursery schools and playgroups tend to operate shorter sessions and have older children.

Children with special needs

The three most commonly recorded activities for tracked children in terms of content (paints, food, and stories) were also popular among the special needs group (being ranked 4th, 3rd, and 2nd, respectively). The most commonly recorded process area (observing) was common to both groups. However there were more notable differences between the group of children with special needs and the group of tracked children in terms of process than in terms of content: these may reflect the special needs represented. For example, some of the children with special needs were engaged in physio-therapeutic activities, which explains the high ranking of gross bodily movements (the 4th most frequently observed process) among this group.

The children with special needs were more frequently observed working without other children in comparison with the other tracked children. This would seem to indicate a difference between these two groups, although with the small numbers involved in the special needs group a chance association cannot be ruled out. Children with special needs were less frequently observed in activities which did not include adults.

Finally, the children with special needs were found to operate at an 'above routine' level more often than the tracked children.

Further research on this subject could perhaps also be tailored to gauge the extent to which children with special needs are integrated in the sense that they have the opportunity to engage in appropriate activities.

8 Providers in Action

Observations of practice and discussions with staff

Introduction

This chapter reports on the results of using an observation schedule to record staff' activities as they worked with children in the centre, following which the observed activities and interactions were discussed. Given their crucially important contribution to the overall quality of pre-five provision, such observations and discussions were felt to be vital: the interaction which takes place between staff and children is possibly the most important factor in promoting, extending, and facilitating children's learning and personal and social development in pre-five centres.

The observations focused on twenty eight female staff in the study centres, comprising

fourteen nursery nurses/officers

four childcare workers

three nursery teachers

three playleaders

two partners in a private nursery

one officer in charge

one YTS student based in a playgroup.

The discussions which followed sought to explore providers' aims and roles in the context of the observed activities, and were intended to illuminate some aspects of the craft of childcare and education. Details of this method are given in Chapter 3.

Participation in this exercise required some organisation on the part of the study centres since cover was required for the participating staff during interview, and arranging cover was particularly difficult for playgroups. On some occasions the only playleader on duty had to be interviewed in the playroom in order for her to be able to keep watch over the children at the same time. Clearly these were far from satisfactory interview conditions, and the resulting material from playgroups is relatively 'thin' in consequence.

The following are the central questions on which the discussions were based:

- What was the purpose of your activities during the period of observation?
- How are the children benefiting from your actions, or from your declining to act in certain situations?
- What might the children have learnt as a consequence of your actions and inactions?
- On what basis might you treat different children differently?

Although primarily concerning the role of staff and the nature of staff interaction with children, this exercise yielded a great deal of information relevant to the children's own activities and what these were intended to achieve. Such information emerged in the course of each of the discussions, as the activities of staff and their purpose tended to be described in the context of the activities the children had been engaging in and the purpose of these activities for the children. This is not surprising, as analysis of the interaction between children and staff implies this sort of contextual reference if it is to be meaningful.

The issues discussed are closely related, reflecting the holistic nature of the early learning environment, and this has made organising the findings under discrete headings less than straightforward. Often, statements on a given subject include related references to other issues and, in order to preserve the total impact of the relevant discussion, this has resulted in liberal use of verbatim statements and a fairly high degree of cross referencing, with a number of the illustrative examples which follow touching on issues beyond the heading under which they appear.

For ease of reference in reporting findings nursery schools and classes are termed nursery schools, while day nurseries, family centres, and community nurseries are communally referred to as day nurseries.

■ Overall purpose of the centre

Although the discussions with staff were not primarily intended to investigate the overall aims of the provision, several staff did make pertinent remarks, which serve to set the scene for the analysis of specific observed activities. For example, a nursery nurse working in a nursery school summed up the centre's aims as follows:

> *We are trying to encourage children's self confidence and their independence and we do that by thinking about their social emotional, physical and intellectual development. So in every activity that we provide we think about these areas of development.*

Similarly, the following assessment of the range of benefits arising from attendance was provided by a teacher from another nursery school :

> *There are lots of benefits: being used to being away from their parents, mixing and socialising with other children, sharing, turn taking. They begin to understand about looking at books and there are lots of pre-language and pre-maths skills.*

She went on to explain that, while attendance at the centre did have benefits in terms of preparation for school, she did not believe this to be the centre's *raison d'être*.

> *We are not here as a preparation for school. We are here because of the benefits that children can gain from pre-school experience. And there are benefits for school, but that's not the only reason that we're here.*

Preparation for school was a recurring theme in discussions on the 'Purpose of the observed activities', reported below.

Finally, social development outcomes were stressed by a nursery nurse in a private nursery, who explained:

> *They can gain a lot of confidence. We praise them a lot, it gives them self-esteem and they get a lot of pleasure.*

The nature of the observed activities

During the vast majority of the observation periods children were taking part in games and other activities associated with the exploration of concepts such as colour, shape, size, and number, or in creative pursuits involving manual skills. Often elements of both were present, as in drawing and painting, for example. There were also several examples of gross motor activity, (normally in conjunction with music), book related activities (such as story telling), and a few activities which were primarily imaginative in nature (for example, imitating farm animals). No activities related to multi-cultural issues or using multi-cultural materials were observed.

Practical activities such as eating, tidying up, nappy changing and toilet visits with the children also took place during a number of the observation periods.

Although the observations were based on a twenty minute activity period, the ensuing discussions gave the opportunity for staff to set the observed activities in context, describing previous preparatory activity and/or subsequent follow up. For example, a baking activity observed in a was set in context as follows:

> *I didn't just say to the children 'Let's make a cake!'. We talked about it during the week. ... I described the cake ... the children went out shopping for ingredients, taking the recipe with us. We looked at pictures of Christmas cakes, and chose the tin to make it in. ... Starting from first principles and giving them the whole picture. Hopefully we will decorate the cake and the parents will get a piece.*
>
> Nursery nurse: day nursery

Elsewhere, a nursery nurse in a partnership nursery pointed out that the observed activity had been related to an ongoing (Scottish) theme.

Another reference to the wider picture related to the need to strike a balance in terms of the range of social settings and the balance of free and directed activities experienced:

> *I think it's important to have a balance between their own free play, the group times and also coming together as a whole class and feeling part of the whole, if you like. Singing is a good way, singing and story time are the times when we usually come all together and you can usually tell by their responses that they're enjoying it.*
>
> Nursery school teacher

The most commonly encountered social context was for the observed member of staff to be involved with a group of up to six children. There were many instances of individual and personal attention, most occurring within such a group, but some in a one-to-one situation. For example, in one day nursery children dispersed to activities of their choice, having been asked what they wanted to do by a nursery nurse. The observer then recorded her activities as she related to various children, largely on a one-to-one basis.

Purpose of the observed activities

The purposes of the observed activities can be categorised in terms of learning outcomes - such as promoting awareness of shape and colour, improving language skills, developing recall, learning how to follow rules, and enhancing memory - and social development outcomes –such as building confidence and enhancing capacity for and quality of social interaction. A single activity was often seen as fulfilling a range of purposes, and the achievement of learning and social/developmental outcomes often went hand in hand. Numerous examples of the multiplicity of purposes involved could be quoted. The following three are taken from nursery schools, but they are broadly representative.

> *(1) I saw it as a language game in that where the adult is involved then I could be the model, if you like, for their language. Also I see it as a social thing because it involves the children playing together. There is turn taking ...it is encouraging their concentration, it was also a game that encouraged memory skills... Also I think it is quite good for a child who is a bit hesitant.*
>
> Nursery nurse

> *(2) There are a lot of benefits. There's the turn taking and the group activity, the conversation that they're getting. They're learning about colour, shape, and number and about the rules.*
>
> Teacher

> *(3) There are benefits right across the whole developmental board. Physically there are the manipulative movements: the pincer grip, picking up shapes, putting them down, sprinkling ... Intellectually I am trying to encourage recall, trying to promote an awareness of colour and shape: that is mathematical, intellectual development. An activity like that promotes lots of opportunities for language and you get feedback from the children. Emotionally there is a sense of well being - it's lovely, it's cosy, it's nice. We are all sitting there and we are chatting and the children have a sense of well being because it's a beautiful end product: those pictures were lovely.*
>
> Nursery nurse

Similarly, in response to an enquiry regarding purpose, a partnership nursery nurse responded that she thought the children were learning in all activities undertaken in the centre, and went on to describe the benefits of the observed activity in relation to language, colour, social skills, co-ordination, and the experience of aiming at an objective.

The following concerns the potential range of learning outcomes arising from painting, and touches on the value of attendance at pre-five provision in terms of providing experiences not generally feasible in the home:

> *I think they can learn about colour, movement up and down and across, different new words and what they mean, texture - the paint being runny and being asked 'what was the paint like? hard/soft?'... it is a very good learning experience. It is something that you only really find in a nursery place or a crèche but you don't have at home... they are learning an awful lot in doing just that one activity that they enjoy about space, colour, shape, and movement.*
>
> Nursery nurse: day nursery

Baking could also provide a new experience for some children:

> *There are children who don't get the experience of baking at home - maybe they are just used to mum or dad shopping and they get a biscuit or cake from the shop and I think it's quite good that they know that they can make these things. It is just all part of the learning experience.*
>
> Nursery nurse: nursery school

This is one of two examples of children engaged in baking under the supervision and guidance of a nursery nurse, the other of which took place in a day nursery. Both described the activity as providing a wide range beneficial experiences, including enjoyment, co-operating in a small group, sharing, taking turns, using listening skills, developing the senses of taste and smell, familiarisation with descriptive language, drawing on existing language, mixing ingredients and seeing the result, seeing an activity through its various stages, and learning about hygiene. This suggests that the baking task afforded experiences relevant to every area of the 5-14 guidelines. During the course of baking in the day nursery, the children were encouraged to be as independent as possible - for example, sieving ingredients and pouring milk - with the nursery nurse describing herself as 'keen to guide them but leaving it in their own hands'. The encouraging of this sort of

independence was felt to be particularly appropriate 'when working towards going to school'.

For example, a nursery nurse from the day nursery where the baking activity was observed set out her reasons for choosing the five children who had taken part. This could be seen as akin to building a 'team', based on an assessment of the varying strengths and development requirements of each:

> *One girl is very quiet; she responds well in the group and does have language. She enjoyed taking her turn and she knew a lot about the ingredients .. and what to do. Mark needs help with listening and social skills ... he has delayed language development and the activity can help with this - textures, consistency, taste, beating, whipping, stirring, mixing. He was chatting away, though not always in context; he responds well in a small group. ... He tended to do things automatically but not always the right thing, so you have to say 'no' and stop him through listening to you. Another of the children has good vocabulary and language. I thought she would help. She must have lots of experience of doing this at home. The fourth child is very shy. He is cheerful but needs help with social language. Also, he has a short attention span. I had to keep bringing him - and Mark - back into the group setting. The fifth child has come on a lot. She used to be very clingy. I had to build a relationship with this child. She now interacts well with children and adults, and has a special friend [and] good language.*

A given activity was often intended to address different needs for different children, depending on the child's stage of development. For example, participation in a game involving colour matching was felt to be primarily of social significance to one of the children, who was described as 'very solitary' :

> *It was nice to see him being brought into that situation where he could play a game with the other children. He's not good in colours but that's neither here nor there. It will come eventually. But just to see him playing with other children and enjoying that experience.*
>
> Nursery nurse: nursery school

A partner in a private nursery also touched on this, with reference to a card game involving finding matching pairs:

> *I specifically took two of our hyperactive children to this game because I feel they need stretched a bit more because they are both very bright. You probably observed that they were getting most of the pairs. ... Lindsay is going to school soon and I feel that she needs to concentrate a bit more and because they enjoy the game it does help.*

As well as the nature of and mode of participation in activities, practical matters such as the layout of the learning environment could also be geared to the forthcoming school experience. For example, a colour recognition exercise in a playgroup had taken place in the context of structured groups of children who sat around tables in designated positions: the playleader explained that these aspects of the activity were felt to be appropriate in terms of preparation for school. Also, a partner in a private nursery felt that the development of social skills in the nursery was relevant to preparation for school – 'to make the transition to school a bit easier' – but said that the nursery did not aim to prepare the children for school work. On the other hand, a nursery nurse in another private nursery explained how she saw the observed activity, which involved familiarising the children with geometrical shapes, as helping prepare for the academic aspects of school:

> *They will be going to school. They have another year to go but it good to start them off doing things and they are learning about colours, lines, and shapes.*

Generally speaking, the approach to academic development was to concentrate on pre-writing skills and pre-maths skills, with a reluctance to undertake schoolwork proper. For example, pencil control might be practised, but staff would not seek to develop the capacity to form letters. A nursery nurse in a partnership nursery voiced a generally held view when she said: 'We have to watch not to overlap: it's very basic stuff.'

■ Mode of learning

Introduction

The holistic nature of children's learning clearly emerged. For example, learning which colours are which would take place in the context of choosing colours, talking about colours, and using coloured materials such as paint. Also, experiences from participation in a particular activity could be carried over and copied elsewhere. For example, following a baking activity, a nursery nurse in a day nursery observed:

> *Now the children will probably paint, or play with dough, based on this activity. Often in the sand, you see them copying activities from here.*

Perhaps the nature of the pre-five learning experience was best summed up by a nursery nurse from a nursery school who, discussing a pre-maths activity, said that although they did not realise it, the children were 'learning without being taught'.

While staff have a key role to play in facilitating learning it was also recognised that children could learn from each other.

> *Some of the children really knew what the game was all about and other children were struggling. And the children who knew how to play were helping the other children. There was a good lot of communication about the game. They were concentrating on the game rather than chatting about other things.*
>
> Nursery nurse: nursery school

Enjoyment, satisfaction, and achievement

The importance of enjoyment in facilitating learning was frequently emphasised. For example, asked about the purpose of a painting activity involving three boys aged three, a nursery nurse in a day nursery touched on the importance of enjoyment to motivation and therefore to the learning outcome:

> *I think the purpose is that it is a learning experience. They really enjoy it and that is the most important thing. If they enjoy it first of all they can learn a lot more about it, but if they are not enjoying it then they are bored.*

Such boredom could lead to disruptive behaviour, as a partner in a private nursery explained:

> *When they get like that you know that they have had enough and there is no good trying to carry it on. They are ready to move on to something else. If the children are occupied they are quite happy and they behave, but when they are bored they become out of hand.*

Some staff referred to enjoyment as an end in itself. For example, a day nursery teacher explained the purpose of an activity involving three children aged under three as follows:

> *It's just to give them another experience, a kind of tactile adventure over these mats like stepping stones. I think they quite enjoy it. ... they enjoy running about without their shoes and socks on for a change ... and it is sometimes quite nice to have a bit of freedom and do something different.*

Reflecting on an activity described as 'bubble painting' in which four three year olds had been involved, a partnership nursery nurse emphasised the importance of process over the end result at this stage of child development, while touching on the importance of enjoyment, again linked to novelty, as an objective in its own right.

> *I felt that they enjoyed it and that was my main aim ... because at that age group they like messy things and it gave them the experience of blowing through the straw whereas they are usually sucking out of the straw. They enjoy the bubbles coming up and it doesn't really matter with that age group whether the end product turns out or not, it is really about the enjoyment of doing the activity. That is why I spent so long talking about the bubbles and letting them blow the bubbles rather than seeing what it turned out like in the end.*

As children progress towards school age, seeing activities through to a conclusion and achieving an end result begin to be emphasised. Thus, while the experience of freedom of expression and use of the imagination were felt to be valuable components of the pre-five experience, as children moved towards school age opportunities for free play began to be restricted in order to prepare children for the more formal primary school environment. Inhibiting choice as to how activities developed and encouraging children to see an activity through to a conclusion - which was also felt to foster a sense of achievement - could be part of this. For example, being asked to draw something specific rather than what children preferred to draw was seen by a partnership nursery nurse as preparation for school 'because when they are at school they will be given certain tasks'.

As well as preparing for school, seeing a task through was felt to provide a sense of achievement and staff might intervene to encourage this:

> *One little child who is not here today tends to start things and then gives up - he's got great ideas but they never materialise - so I give him quite a lot of input to try and help him actually create something and achieve something at the end which he can take away and maybe paint or, if its a boat, take it away and play with it in the water tray. I try to encourage then to actually complete a task and think it through.*
>
> Day nursery teacher

Also relevant to a sense of satisfaction and achievement was the general practice of continuing with a game until all of the children playing had been able to complete it, rather than ending when one child won. A nursery nurse in a private nursery contrasted the nursery with primary school in this respect:

> *I feel that in a lot of games it is not fair just to finish it with a winner. It is better that they all get a chance to fill in their cards. They did want to go on with the game. It wasn't the case that Scott had won and that was it - like in school ...*

In fact, the term 'win' tended to be deliberately avoided in favour of 'finish' in order to prevent children feeling left out or having a sense of failure. There was one exception, when a YTS student working in a playgroup said 'Soibhan won, give her a clap'; however, this was perceived as an attempt to inject a sense of achievement into an activity that was petering out for lack of interest.

Progressing by stages

Learning by progressing through incremental stages was a recurring theme and some staff saw facilitating progression as a central to the activities of the centre.

> *Our aim is always to try and take the children that one step further on, whether it be their knowledge of things, naming things, discussing things, using language, or using their imagination.*
>
> Nursery nurse: nursery school

However, the pace of learning was not to be forced, but rather it was deemed important to progress in a manner sensitive to children's individual needs and stages of development. For example, a nursery nurse in a nursery school had been encouraging children in their play with sand and water to think through concepts of temperature and heat transfer, eventually asking 'Why is it cold when it's warm in here?'. When the children didn't answer, she decided to let the matter drop, feeling that the question might have been 'a bit beyond them'. A nursery nurse in a private nursery also stressed the need to progress at a pace suitable to the children's needs:

> *You don't want to push them too far when you're starting off. What we do is build them up gradually, take it one step at a time.*

On the other hand, if lack of progression was deemed to be a deliberate ploy then this would be addressed. The following example is from a teacher in a day nursery, who had been encouraging children to be more versatile in their use of a work bench:

> *Most of the boys use it more flexibly but there's one very dominant boy in that group, who in fact, keeps taking it back to that [making long drills] and I almost feel it's because he knows I'm not happy with it ... So I was trying to include him and tried to make progress using materials he wanted to use but in a more constructive manner ... He doesn't take on board what I'm trying to do and I'm still trying.*

(The teacher's use of the word 'boys' rather than 'children' in the above is of note. She explained that the work bench tended to be dominated by boys, although she tried to encourage girls to use it too: she said that she was pleased that a girl had in fact used the work bench during the observation period.)

The timing of moving onto a new stage was touched on by a teacher at a nursery school when she said:

> *They are very comfortable with what goes on and once they are like that you can push them on a bit further and introduce new things to keep them interested.*

Discussing the use of books, a nursery nurse in a day nursery who had been reading a book with a girl whose concentration was poor, necessitating various strategies to keep her attention, described the eventual outcome of such activity in terms of self-sufficiency, 'in that they would go and take a book and sit down and enjoy it by themselves'.

Certain resources were particularly versatile and intended to be used in different ways, depending on the child's current stage of development. For example, a teacher in a day nursery described in some detail the purpose of having a work bench:

> *It has different stages, people use it in different ways. Some children are just using it to co-ordinate hand and eye movement and are enjoying the sound and enjoying what they are doing and being able to hit a nail somewhere approximately into the wood. Some children I am encouraging to take a further stage and actually make something; to actually join something together and see that the purpose of a nail is to join two bits of wood together and then I would talk to them and encourage them to sort of plan roughly what they are trying to do and to evaluate what they have done if they have finished. ... They take things from one stage to the other, their actual control over bricks and skills and ability to make things increases and so does their ability to work through different ideas.*

Arrangements for assessing progress were not broached in the course of these discussions (having been investigated by other research methods) but some relevant comments did emerge. Most referred to informal methods, whereby staff kept themselves appraised of the current requirements and achievements of each child by observing their everyday activities in the centre. Such approaches might, of course, have complemented more formal arrangements such as the thrice annual assessment procedure mentioned by a

nursery nurse working in a nursery school. This included a colour identification check; indeed the ability to correctly identify colours appeared to be a commonly used benchmark of development.

As the staff were observed working directly with children, staff interactions and organisational issues emerged only tangentially. However, it was clear that liaison among staff concerning the children's progress could be important to the planning process.

> *I feel it's my job to co-ordinate things, to get feedback ... because I can't be everywhere at once... I need their [the other staff feedback in order to plan any changes and progressions and to make sure that we have a balance of activities and that there's always something new and interesting to challenge the children.*
>
> Nursery school teacher

Relating to home and the wider community

A number of references to the links between children's experiences in the centre and their experiences in the home and wider community emerged in the course of the discussions. On the one hand, some of the observed activities were felt to benefit children by providing an experience which was not, and in some instances could not be, made available to them at home (see 'Purpose of the observed activities' above for examples). At the same time it was generally felt to be important to relate the learning process to the children's previous experience. A number of illustrative examples could be quoted. For example, during the course of a discussion with a nursery nurse working in a nursery school, the researcher observed that she had tended to relate her conversation with the children to their home situation. She explained that this was geared towards improving vocabulary:

> *Just to get them using the right word and to make sure that they knew what the things are and what they are used for. If they have got them at home, giving them an opportunity to use vocabulary to expand on a situation.*

Similarly, a teacher in a nursery school spoke of there always being opportunities to develop language by linking activities to the children's wider experience. In an observed example, she asked children who had drawn a bus 'Where is the bus going to?', and they had responded with references to their own experience (including their experience of mass communications - one child was going to 'Coronation Street'). Also, a nursery nurse in a day nursery, discussing the use of books, said: 'it might also get them to come to terms with their own feelings and experiences', and children attending a partnership nursery had been asked by a nursery nurse to draw pictures of their mother and themselves following which, as the researcher observed:

> *There was a lot of talking about mummies and how they look and why they look the way they did - one mummy was sad and one mummy was angry.*

There were also a number of instances of staff and children conversing about the home situation in abstraction from specific activities - for example, while stopping for a snack.

Staff took cognisance of the influence of children's wider experience on their behaviour, and in the course of several discussions staff assessed that certain children had acted as they did because of the influence of the home environment. A nursery nurse in a nursery school provided the following example, relating to a boy whom she had encouraged to make his own shapes in a sandpit:

> *That little boy, if you are prepared, you will do everything for him and he can do things for himself ... I think he'll have an awful lot done for him at home, you know, if he wants anything done it's done for him. It's quicker, you know. ... He's not quite confident with his work. If he can get it done for him well, why bother.*

This did not, however, mean that she believed staff should generally take a 'hands off' approach. She went on to express the view (firmly rooted in her own experience of her daughters' interaction with their own children) that the experience of playing along with an adult was something which children tended not to experience in the home.

> *I don't think, you know, a lot of children actually get adults to play with them. Their mum's usually quite busy. She'll give them something to do, maybe a bit of dough when she's baking. But not an awful lot of mums play with their children.*

She felt that having the opportunity for this sort of interaction with an adult was one of the benefits to children attending the centre.

A nursery nurse from a nursery school pointed out that children could carry their new experiences back to the home:

> *'When they were finished they all said 'Please may I leave the table'. ... And we've heard some mums saying that they say it at home now and they think 'Oh, that's quite nice'. So it's going home and the parents are realising that they can say these things and do these things and wash their own dishes that they don't get a chance to do at home.*

Given that liaison with parents was not observed it did not feature greatly in the discussions. However, this subject was referred to by a nursery nurse in a partnership nursery who had noticed that one of the children had not been 'his natural self' that morning, and remarked that she had not had the chance to speak to his mother, who normally provided information as to how he had been at home, as well as by a day nursery teacher, who explained how she had asked the mother of a disruptive child to a meeting at the nursery in an attempt to resolve the problem.

■ Staff/child interaction

Introduction

The interaction between staff and children in pre-five centres is a crucial factor in facilitating children's learning and enhancing the development potential of their activities and experiences. This section explores the main observed elements of staff/child interaction, and largely relates to how staff aim to facilitate the achievement of purposes and implementation of modes discussed above. As such, several relevant aspects have been touched on in the preceding sections.

Characteristic of the *modus operandi* was flexibility and reliance on staff's own assessments and perceptions rather than on a rigid theory of practice. As a nursery nurse in a nursery school observed:

> *I hadn't planned doing anything like that, it was just as the ideas came up.*

An impressively broad range of competences is involved, perhaps none more important than simply being emotionally and physically close to the children. As a nursery school nurse who had been observed making pictures with a small group of children remarked:

> *It's me as an adult and as a friend, hopefully, ...it's really very much a sharing sort of experience and I think that's important emotionally and socially.*

Intervention vs non-intervention

How children benefit from staff actions, or from staff declining to act in certain situations, was one of the key questions which the discussions were based. In seeking to maximise the learning and development potential of children's experience in pre-five centres, there is a balance to be struck between interacting with children in order to provide focus and

direction and to ensure that their activities are not to the detriment of others, and allowing children scope for choice both as to whether or not to participate in activities and in the nature and duration of their involvement in the activities undertaken. Allowing children choice can help ensure their interest, thereby enhancing learning potential. On the other hand, ensuring that all children participate safely in a suitable range of activities from an educational and developmental point of view, and enhancing the learning and development potential of the activities undertaken, implies a degree of control and direction.

Facilitating learning

Facilitating learning is a central issue in terms of staff interaction with children in pre-five centres. A wealth of material emerged from the discussions concerning the appropriate circumstances for intervention and for non-intervention, and on the nature of the direction provided, which was broadly geared towards helping children get the most from activities in a 'hands-on' way. As one nursery school teacher explained:

> *I wasn't just doing it for them: I was helping them to do it for themselves.*

This theme was developed by a playleader who described her approach to intervention as follows:

> *If I see them struggling with something I would step in then and help, but I try and encourage them as far as I can to try and do it on their own. ...I mean it doesn't matter if it doesn't look like what it's supposed to look like. It's their work. As long as they've done most of it themselves.*

A teacher in a nursery school described the result of her input in directing a painting activity by comparing the end product achieved to the results of free choice painting, for which the children also had the opportunity:

> *I was aiming to stimulate the painting by asking them to paint specific things. I was asking them to think about vehicles and wheels. So I wasn't giving them a completely free choice to go away and paint whatever they liked. ... The pictures that I brought in definitely stimulated the painting. If I'd just said to them 'I'd like you to paint a picture of something that goes on the road' without any stimulation whatsoever, I wouldn't have got those results. ... they were looking at the pictures and you could see that they'd thought about it and were putting those thoughts into their paintings. ... there's an easel where it's very much free choice painting - they just go when they want to paint and they just paint whatever they want. But if you see the results there compared with someone getting the input ... [they] are quite different.*

A related aspect of staff intervention is the use of pre-prepared materials in creative activities as against aiming for children to produce something from scratch. This was discussed with a partnership nursery nurse, who had asked children to assemble a snowman from various separate parts which she had cut out beforehand, using pictures of a snowman as a guide. She explained that her aim on this particular occasion had been to focus on the correct positioning of the different parts of the snowman, and that if the activity had started with the children cutting out shapes for themselves and been less directive in terms of reference to a 'model', then it would simply have taken too long for this end to be achieved.

As previously noted (under 'Mode of learning' above), seeking to curb children's natural inclinations as to how activities develop was sometimes seen as part of preparation for school. For example, pre-school children attending a partnership nursery were shown pictures of a castle and asked to draw a castle for themselves. The children's interest became focused on the moat in the picture; they fantasised about the presence of creatures such as crocodiles and sharks in the water, and were inclined to concentrate their attention

to drawing these. However, the nursery nurse continued to direct their attention back to drawing the castle, explaining her actions as follows:

> *...Instead of being given a piece of paper and asked to draw a picture, they were asked to draw a picture of a castle. ... It is to get them ready for going to school - you know, helping their concentration so that they will be able to sit and listen and do the tasks that they are asked to.*

One nursery school teacher, who felt that in general terms the nursery should seek to 'push children on a bit further' once they are comfortable with the nursery environment, introducing new activities to maintain interest, explained that she had nonetheless withdrawn from the observed activity shortly after her arrival on the scene, as the children appeared completely absorbed in it:

> *...we were very busy in the sand and they were playing really nicely, they were really enjoying the dry sand. So I spoke to a few of them about what they were doing, but really they were too busy to talk to me, so I ended up stepping back. ... It's a very fine line - the balance, I think.*

Asked how she kept the balance between directing children and just letting them get on with what they happen to be doing, the same teacher replied:

> *Basically, they stop talking to you and they start talking to each other, and also probably, the way that they answer any questions.*

Relatedly, a nursery nurse in a nursery school gave a detailed explanation of the role of intervention by means of dialogue in enhancing the learning potential of an activity.

> *I didn't want to intrude really, I just wanted to see what they were doing. I just spoke a while ... just to make them think a bit again. The dry sand pours - what were they using to pour the sand? Really just to stimulate some sort of thought and conversation to think of what they were doing. Encouraging them to speak about it and use language. I know they get a lot out of doing it quietly themselves but sometimes it is nice just to talk about what they are doing so that it makes them think about it and with a bit of luck you can introduce words that flit through their minds but at least they have heard it once ... Just use language and be interested and encourage them and give them a wee clap when they really achieve something because they really like to be praised."*

And a nursery nurse in a day nursery who had been working through a book first with one child, then in a similar fashion with another, described her approach as follows:

> *I would start off by showing them the picture of the book and see if they could tell me what the story was about by just looking at the cover, then tell them who the story is by. It doesn't really mean much to them just now but it lets them know there is more information on the cover like the name of the author. ... And then trying to get a flow to the story, reading through the story and at the same time stopping when I felt it was relevant to interrupt a wee bit about it and if I felt it was too long on a page, if she was getting fed up with it, I would turn a page or get her to turn over to the next bit. ... I tried to get her to reason why it [the story] was happening. ... Why does he want to get up into the tree? Does he want to get peace? Do you ever feel like that? Trying to encourage her to talk about her feelings.*

Facilitating social development and consideration for others

A second tension for staff concerning whether or not to provide direction relates to social control. Allowing children to explore the potential of the pre-five environment by behaving as they like and going where they like has to be balanced by intervention to guide and modify children's behaviour out of consideration for others, and to further the basic socialisation process by promoting behaviour - such as good 'table manners' - which is acceptable in the wider community. A number of the discussions touched on ways staff

had intervened to deal with behaviour which was in some way disruptive or anti-social, or considered occasions when staff had chosen to stand back from behaviour which might have been seen as such.

In responding to behaviour felt to be inappropriate, staff would take into account the child's reasons for behaving in this way. For example, a day nursery teacher explained how she had intervened to ask a noisy child to keep quiet, trying to get across to him that it was not necessary to shout to be listened to; she felt that at home he might have to yell to get attention, and that he was carrying this behaviour over to the nursery.

Another example of a selective approach to potentially disruptive behaviour - in this case noise - was provided by a day nursery teacher who said that if noise was aimed at something constructive, as in use of a work bench, then that would not concern her (although it had concerned other staff when the workbench was introduced). On the other hand:

> *When they're playing at hammers as they were doing ... that is different and I want them to see that that's pretend play, they're not really hammering anything, the noise has no purpose and there's no need to make a noise at all. Certainly not enough noise to annoy somebody who's trying to listen to a story or ... doing something quieter.*

Some of the children in this nursery were said to be 'quiet and fairly intimidated' in the face of one boy who had 'a very dominant effect'. The same group was described as 'very different' in the absence of this child, who attended morning sessions only. The teacher had tried to involve this child's mother in tackling the problem, albeit without success:

> *There's no problem apparently at home, there's no problem with his childminder in the afternoon. She [the child's mother] doesn't see that the inconsistencies in his routine and pattern can have an effect. I feel they are doing: I feel it quite strongly.*

She nonetheless persevered in her attempts to improve the situation, and felt that some progress had been achieved.

> *It's difficult to work on, because if you try to direct him to another activity it doesn't really work. ... But I'm making progress there, I've found the sort of things that he finds rewarding. I mean, to be playing with the other children is, in itself, rewarding for him - that's what he likes doing, so if I can talk to him and reason that that is not the way you play with other children, hopefully we might get a bit more positive view ... But it is a problem...*

This teacher felt that controlling disruptive and anti-social behaviour was more difficult in the day nursery than in a primary school, explaining her view as follows:

> *The situation is so much more fluid than a school, there are more opportunities for individual behaviour problems ... to have an effect on the group.*

An example of responding to socially unacceptable behaviour was provided by a nursery nurse in a private nursery, who had pointed out to a child that she was being rude. She explained:

> *It is part of learning, in society they have to get used to rights and wrongs. We don't mind correcting them when they are wrong and the kids don't seem to bother either. ... she sat back down and joined in.*

A partner in a private nursery employed a range of approaches to dealing with the behaviour of a child who, in preparation for a game, had thrown cards around, rather than arranging them on the table as required. Firstly she asked him to 'lay them down nicely'. When this failed, she ignored him and in the end he simply handed her the cards. She then provided positive reinforcement by asking him to turn the cards to start off the game

'because you are so good at it'. Following somewhat unruly play, in the course of which he had been threatened with removal to another part of the nursery if he didn't calm down, she took his hand and gently pulled him close. She later commented that 'sometimes when they are like that they just need a bit of comfort and ...affection. Eventually she felt it appropriate to change the activity from the card game to story reading, feeling that the 'obstreperous' behaviour was related to the element of 'winning' in the card game, and that the children might have been showing off to the researcher. She also felt that the activity might not have been stretching the children sufficiently to maintain their concentration:

> *We have just started this game and I noticed that they got right into it earlier in the game than they had, and I think that might have been the reason they got fed up a bit quicker, because they mastered it quicker this time.*

In another discussion, a nursery nurse in a nursery school described the behaviour of a disruptive child and her response to him as follows:

> *Well he is very disruptive, that little boy. He tends to go to the other children's things and spoil them, knock them over, or deliberately break them, or just interrupt whatever they are doing, so I was trying to avoid that by directing him in other ways but his concentration span is just flipped from one thing to another so I was really trying to avoid him disrupting ... the children who were actually doing things.... reminding him about hitting and knocking things over, pushing people - just general basic things like manners, caring for one another, considering one another, socialising together, and thinking about other people.*

As many the above examples indicate, staff tended to devote particular attention to disruptive children, both for the sake of their own development and for the smooth functioning of the group.

Ensuring safety, and intervention for other practical reasons

Considerations of safety entail an obligation on staff to intervene and restrict children's free choice as required. Rules might be made with safety considerations in mind. However, as one nursery school teacher pointed out, it is possible to give children a sense of ownership of such rules.

> *Rules sound very structured, but I do have simple rules that I have sat down with the class and talked about. So they have had a hand in deciding what the rules are. It's not just my ideas, but it's theirs as well. For their own safety and for the safety of everyone else. (Also) ...so they can get the most out of it.*

She went on to explain that, in terms of her intervention during the observation period, safety had gone hand in hand with protection of toys and equipment.

> *The purpose at the start in moving the train set was a safety thing. We have a few rules here and one of them is looking after the toys and the way that they were moving the train set right underneath the climbing frame meant that someone was going to jump on top of it.*

The baking activity observed in a nursery school also provided an example of safety considerations. At one point the nursery nurse wanted to use a knife to cut the dough and she herself fetched one from the drawer behind her rather than letting a child get it. During the discussion she explained that she did this because there is a rule that the children do not use that drawer because there are sharp and dangerous knives and tools in it. And a nursery nurse in another nursery school may have had safety in mind when she said that the children were not allowed to run.

Safety might also include protecting children from the activities of others. One nursery nurse in a nursery school said that she was 'constantly monitoring' a disruptive and aggressive boy 'in case he harms another child'. In a more isolated incident, a nursery school teacher explained her initial lack of response to a child who had been throwing sand:

> *The reason why I didn't say to Edward straight away about not throwing sand was because he was actually throwing it into the sand pit, he wasn't throwing it haphazardly. ... if he had been, it would have been 'don't do that' straight away.*

However, after another child complained, the teacher intervened to deter this behaviour by explaining that sand can hurt if it gets into the eyes.

Staff might intervene to direct the children's activities for other practical reasons. For example, it emerged in the course of many of the observations and discussions that seeing an activity through to its conclusion is felt to include participating in tidying up afterwards: an activity which children, like adults, can be reluctant to undertake. Fairly formal strategies could be employed to help ensure that the work of tidying up was fairly distributed:

> *We used to just say 'It's tidying up time' and wherever they were they had to tidy up, but you'd find that there were quite a few who would just come and sit down and not help at all. ...So this way is more controlled and also you can give out jobs and you know who's supposed to be doing it. All this week the blue group tidy up in this room, next week they'll be on to the corridor. It's fairer ... Sometimes they don't tidy up because they don't really know what it means. ... At the start of the year we always emphasise 'You've been playing with the toys, so you have to put them away so that it's ready for the next class that's coming in' (or so that it's nice for themselves for the next day).*
>
> Nursery school teacher

On the other hand, while children might be expected to help with preparation for a snack or meal, this tended to be approached more flexibly, with children left to their own devices if engrossed in an activity at the time.

> *Normally I would have children there helping, but they were just all busy.*
>
> Nursery nurse: nursery school

An example of intervention aimed at promoting health was provided by a nursery nurse in a nursery school, who said she felt a responsibility to mention to the children over lunch that if they could do without salt then so much the better. However, she had been careful to approach this in a low key fashion, to avoid attracting the interest of those who didn't use salt, who might then become curious enough to try it.

Flexibility and responsiveness

Much of the above discussion - on 'Facilitating learning', for example - illustrates the flexible and responsive approach advocated and practised. In addition, a few specific examples of staff developing activities and interaction in response to the children's requests and interests are worthy of mention.

Such responsiveness could be planned in advance, in the light of staff assessments of the children's current interests, or could be spontaneous, reacting to children's on the spot requests or more momentary displays of interest. As an example of the latter, children attending a playgroup had asked to introduce a game of imitating farm animals to their normal singing and exercise routine. The playleader explained:

It wasn't actually what I started out to do but it was just the way it evolved.

And a nursery nurse in a nursery school had responded to the children's mistaking icicles on the centre roof for glass by breaking some off and allowing them to experience the ice melting into water in their hands, thus providing an unplanned learning experience by 'catching them at the moment when their interest is there'.

An example of planned activity building on the children's interests too facilitate progress in learning was provided by the same nursery nurse. She had involved the children in making snowmen from playdough, including making scarves to be tied round their necks. She observed:

It was an introduction to tying ... because they are interested in snowmen at the moment, and I thought it was a good opportunity to extend it that wee bit further with the tying bits."

Facilitating concentration

Concentration was frequently specified among the purposes of the observed activities. It was generally recognised that children's concentration is vital to the learning process, yet very easily broken, and as such achieving and maintaining concentration tended to be one of the major objectives of staff in their interaction with children in the centres.

Interruptions were felt to be particularly detrimental to concentration. For example, a nursery nurse in a partnership nursery explained how she had responded to the late arrival of a child during a story reading session:

It's an interruption and, at that age group, the moment of any interruptions you can have their attention and then it just goes. So I was aware of welcoming him into the group but getting back on the track again ... back on to the story.

Another nursery nurse working in the same partnership nursery had been engaged in a painting activity with four three year old children. She agreed that she had spent quite some time talking to and asking questions of this particular group in order to maintain their concentration, and touched on the difficulty of dealing with interruptions necessitated by staff having to leave the group.

If you just sit and watch them they get bored and they want to go away and play with toys. ... So you really need to keep their concentration, keep them talking - keep their minds alert, if you like, to keep their concentration going. Andrea said she needed the toilet. A thing like that can break the whole group because I have really got to check on that child ... If I leave the group for any length of time I could come back to paint in the air type of thing, so I try to keep it going.

In this regard, a playleader said that she found the assistance of two YTS students helpful in relieving her of the duty of accompanying children to the toilet, thus allowing her to focus on working with other children. Nevertheless, she was conscious of a requirement to generally oversee all that was going on: as she explained 'I'm that used to looking round about, just making sure that everything else is okay.'

Staff involvement in activities was not always judged to be necessary, however, as staff might judge from the level of the children's involvement that it was appropriate for them to withdraw. As a nursery nurse in a nursery school, who pointed out that she had been working with children continuously for over forty years, explained:

When I slipped away to make the snack, I knew I could get away, that they would carry on if they wanted to carry on ... But I try not to break it by going away and they think

'oh, that's it, so we'll do something else'. Whether it's because I've always done it, or whether it's instinct, I don't know.

Disruption of a group could also result from staff having to leave to deal with anti-social or unsafe behaviour on the part of children elsewhere in the centre. A nursery nurse in one nursery school felt this to be a problem related to lack of staff cover, which was particularly acute when staff were absent from work through illness (as had been the case during the observation period).

A related issue is that of judging when children should be encouraged to switch to another activity, whether for practical reasons - giving others the opportunity to participate - or because they are felt to have realised the potential benefits. A nursery school teacher touched both when she explained how she had directed two groups of children away from different activities, the first because she felt that they had exhausted the possibilities for the present, and the second because other children wished to play there.

I had said to them prior that they had been there a little while. Also, I'd been standing there beside them ... If they had been really busy and concentrating on a certain activity I would have left it for a few more minutes ... I just felt they were ready to move to go and do something else. Whereas the ones in the house, I have to say, I wasn't sure how long some of them had been in. So I didn't want to go in there and say 'right, everybody out'. I gave them a bit more time to say that in a few minutes we're coming back and we're going to move on."

A nursery nurse in a nursery school explained that she tried to introduce change by following on from what the children had been doing 'not just stop it dead'. She went on to give an example illustrating the opposite effect, when another member of staff had caused the interruption of activity by intervening to suggest that the children had been involved for too long:

The conversation was fantastic, the experiments were fantastic, and they were channelling the water. And I said 'oh, they were in the middle of an experiment'. 'Oh well', she said, 'I'll leave them for a few minutes.' It was gone. She'd broken it. It was such a shame.

Facilitating participation

This section concerns the means whereby children came to take part in the observed activities. These range from completely free choice as to whether or not to participate, through guidance and inducements, to being asked directly to take part. There were no instances of children being coerced to participate. Relatedly, how the observed activities came to be chosen and approaches to helping ensure that children remain at activities to see the 'task' through will be considered, as well as any reasons for deciding not to finish the task in hand.

Facilitating participation was generally not difficult, as the mere presence of staff could act as a magnet:

Wherever the adult is you get a whole lot of children coming in beside you, because they like to be beside an adult.

Nursery school teacher

Some of the issues relevant to facilitating participation have been touched on above. For example, under 'Purpose of the observed activities' there is a description of how children attending a day nursery came to be selected to take part in baking according to the nursery nurse's assessment of their various strengths and needs. On the other hand, a nursery nurse

working in a nursery school explained her approach to involving and retaining children in a baking session as follows:

> *Sometimes you ask the children if they would like to bake and they really don't want to do it. So we never force them to do it. We always suggest that they might like to join us and sometimes they sit for a little time and if they get fed up they go away. But I usually like to encourage the children to stay. ... I thought well, five children would be quite good because sometimes there are not an awful lot of jobs. ... I didn't pick the bakers. I left the baking pinnies out to see who would come and then towards the end I needed another two and I did go and ask a couple if they would like to come and they did. But I didn't pick them because I thought they would be specially good at the baking activity... Sometimes they're quite easily distracted with all the other noise that's going on, but I felt that today, because there was a job to keep them all busy, they were all really involved in it ... I didn't want to lose their interest when they first sat down. So that's why I let them grease the trays while the other children were weighing out. ...*

Similarly, a nursery school teacher described how she had encouraged a child to join in painting without insisting that he took part:

> *I was trying to persuade him but I didn't demand that he did painting ... he went off and did something else. ... There was a certain element of choice. I was trying to encourage him but he didn't want to, so we left it.*

The following example of the role of staff in relation to an activity chosen by the children was provided by a nursery school teacher:

> *... a child asked for the game and they chose the game themselves. And automatically other children came and joined in. And it's because they like a group activity, especially when they know an adult's going to supervise. ... [My role was] to help them with the rules and to keep the game going, turn taking.*

In one instance, children playing a card game in a private nursery were felt to be over excited and 'getting out of hand' and so the game was stopped sooner than it would otherwise have been. The member of staff concerned felt that the roots of this lay in the presence together of two boys who were 'a bad combination'. Conversely, when children in a playgroup seemed to be losing interest in the observed activity, the YTS student working with them tried to encourage them to continue but did not insist.

Having a limited number of toys could prove a practical barrier to participation, but was perceived to have beneficial aspects by providing experience of having to share and take turns.

> *Having so many children here - I mean, I had to turn away a wee boy away. ... It was a pity that all the engines were used so Matthew was going to be frustrated ... I try not to send them away, because obviously you want them to play where they want to play. However, I think he had been here already so it wasn't that he hadn't had a turn at all. ... Turn taking is a very basic thing in nursery. It's very hard for children who have come from a home where there's only two or three children to come into such a big area and be expected to share, so it's something that we work on a lot. Also there's a lot of co-operation going on - helping to build the track.*
>
> Nursery school teacher

Differentiation

One of the key questions raised in each of the discussions was 'On what basis do you treat certain children differently from others?'. Where possible this question was linked to specific observed examples. Many of the above examples illustrating staff/child interaction and modes of learning also pertain to differentiation, showing that staff have a child-centred approach to education and social development, tailoring the curriculum as

required, and with clear ideas as to appropriate activities to introduce and encourage in respect of individual children. Also, as discussed in the section on 'Intervention vs non-intervention', staff responded differentially to disruptive children, both in order to facilitate their own social and educational development and out of consideration for others.

In general terms, differentiation was based on an appraisal of children's varying abilities and stages of development.

> *... I virtually ignored poor Catherine in that game, but she's so good with colours that she didn't need the reinforcement. The poorer ones got the extra reinforcement. I'd get them to say the colour back to me, and I'd try to match it with something else that they could bring in to me.*
>
> Nursery nurse: nursery school

Similarly, a nursery nurse working in a day nursery explained:

> *I had to treat the three of them differently because they are all individuals and they are all different at doing one activity. ... Craig, he really enjoys activity and he likes to wait and listen to what I am saying... But the other two, although they enjoy it you have to keep their interest, ask them questions - 'What colour is that? What are we doing? What like is the paint?'*

Differentiation was an operating principle in one of the playgroups, where the playleader (10/1) used the term 'mixed ability' to refer to how pre-school children were organised into groups. This concept appeared to be applied to the children's social rather than academic skills, with the playleader explaining that she hoped that those whose social skills - such as the ability to sit down in a group - were less developed would learn from observing others who were more advanced.

Approach to children with special needs

Children can have special needs in the educational setting for a wide variety of reasons, and some of the subjects previously discussed have a bearing on this issue. The section on 'Purpose of the observed activities' includes the example of two children described as both 'hyperactive' and 'very bright' taking part in an activity intended to stretch their capabilities. Staff described some of the children who were disruptive or anti-social as having special needs: their approach to such children is discussed under the heading 'Facilitating social development and consideration for others'. Furthermore, differentiation (as discussed above) is related to an assessment of the needs of each child, and some staff brought in the concept of special needs in this connection. For example, asked if she was aware of having treated the children differently from each other, a nursery nurse in a partnership nursery described her approach to a disruptive and aggressive child as follows:

> *I was and it may be due to the fact that I think some of them have special needs and need to be treated differently. I always try to make sure I'm sitting right beside James for most of the activities, because I've found in the past there are times when he can be very disruptive and he has certain behavioural difficulties ... He tends to be okay when he's really involved in something and he's beside me, that's really when he's good at group things but ... he can be aggressive towards the other children sometimes... So to avoid that happening in the first instance, I like to sit near him.*

Particular cognisance was taken of social integration in relation to children with special educational needs, with staff keen to ensure that such children were not marginalised in course of group activities. For example, a nursery nurse in a nursery school explained that the group had waited until a particular boy, described as 'a very solitary child' whose speech was poor, was ready to take part before starting to play a game. An example of staff

intervention in this regard was provided by a nursery nurse working in a day nursery. Discussing her involvement in a singing and dancing activity involving the whole group (fourteen children) she said:

> *He is one with special needs but he can be very difficult. I could see that when he was doing that he was out of his depth: he didn't know what to do. I said 'Come on, Brendan, you be my partner' and I took him, you know, rather than him say 'No, don't want you, can't do it'. I didn't want him to feel out of things. We made a wee joke about it. I took him when he was like going to turn back. I took him down to the bottom to meet his partner.*

Such intervention by staff was not always necessary. A teacher in a nursery school, reflecting on a similar group singing and dancing activity, commented on how some of the children had themselves acted to integrate those with special needs into the activity:

> *I was very pleased with the way that the children included the special needs ones. Scott had already danced with Gregg, the wee boy with cerebral palsy, and I didn't think it was fair for him to be made to choose a special needs one again and I suggested that someone might like to choose William. He immediately went over and also Liam was very good when he was chosen at dancing with William. Sometimes, because the special needs can be unpredictable, the children who have not had much experience of them don't like to be chosen. I think somebody shouted out 'No way' and I thought 'Right, we'll nip that one in the bud'. There's one or two that are really very friendly with the children with special needs, even though they can't speak to the normal children, they will quite happily chat away to them and include them in all the normal activities that are going on.*

A fairly detailed discussion of her approach to a child with poor speech was provided by a nursery nurse in a nursery school. She felt that the boy, who had been attending a speech therapist for some time, was deterred from speaking to the other children because they did not understand him. Also, he was very sensitive on this subject:

> *He goes very dour and sullen if you ask him to repeat it sometimes. Sometimes he'll come away with it, but other times he'll just say [sic] 'Right, I've tried with you and that's it.*

She was pleased she was that he had conversed with her during the observation period, and explained why she had given him particular attention:

> *He's very aware that he has got bad speech, so he doesn't speak to you a lot. ... That's why I singled him out to go to him, because if you don't go to him he won't come to you. ... If you don't do it first thing in the morning, you often tend either to forget about him or he gets lost somewhere along the morning ... and he will be on his own somewhere. ... If you single him out and go and speak to him the other children will come along. And it's good for him. Not that he really has a lot of interaction: he doesn't. And this is why I singled him out. Because, basically, we need to get to know James. Even although we've had him six months ... we take time out of each day to go and do something with him."*

This approach was intended to stimulate the child's speech, which was felt to have improved since he had started at the nursery, but the primary focus was on social interaction. In this context, asked what he might have learned from taking part in the observed activity, the nursery nurse replied:

> *That interaction with other children isn't always a bad thing. Not to be frightened of them, to share with them, to give a bit of himself to them. Which he doesn't do. He's a very solitary child.*

Relating to this boy was felt to be beneficial to the other children too:

> *They're learning to react to a child that's a bit different from themselves. They're learning that they have to listen to other people. ... They have to listen that wee bit more carefully. And to put up with him as well: give him the time.*

A second fairly detailed example was provided by another nursery nurse, and concerned a child with Down's syndrome attending the partnership nursery where she worked. She explained the particular relevance of interaction with this child:

> *It's only by having a lot of interaction that they realise he does understand.*

Asked how the nursery approached developing his language, she replied:

> *Well, he is very interested in books ... not so much stories - picture books, and he will point to different parts of the picture and actually understand. He can understand an awful lot; for example, the word 'cake', which has gone from no sound to 'ake'. They were working on sign language ... it's very basic ... mostly what you would do if you were miming. We are quite fortunate to have a speech therapist calling each Monday for Tom.*

Finally, a teacher in a day nursery communicated with a deaf child using sign language, providing a reminder of the need for special training for staff if adequate care and education is to be provided to children with certain special needs.

■ Summary

Staff were observed as they worked with children in their centre and these observations provided the basis of discussion between each of the twenty eight staff observed and a researcher. The discussions explored providers' aims and roles and were intended to illuminate aspects of the craft of childcare and education.

Summary of findings

Principles on which staff worked

- Many of the observed activities were geared towards a multiplicity of aims in terms of both learning outcomes and social development. Staff tended to see their objectives as nurturing, teaching, facilitating, motivating, stimulating, and guiding the children, to enhance both learning, and personal and social development. Emphasis was put on encouraging individuals' self confidence and enjoyment.
- Staff were strongly focused on child development in terms of what children are able to do at different ages and stages. Activities were clearly child-centred, incorporating sensitivity to the needs of individual children and recognition of the value of allowing children to proceed at their own pace and to follow their own interests, albeit within the constraints of a social group. Thus while staff did operate with broad notions of curriculum, this had to suit the particular child.
- It was clear that activities were chosen to complement and extend children's experiences at home.

Ways of working

- Staff would, on the basis of their observations and interactions, select appropriate activities to introduce and encourage, while watching, interacting, and tailoring the curriculum to individual children.
- Characteristic of the *modus operandi* was flexibility and reliance on staff's own assessments and perceptions rather than on a rigid theory of practice.

- Staff were seen to involve the children, stimulating their curiosity, enhancing their power of concentration and making their time in the centre a happy one. They facilitated children's learning by demonstrating appropriate techniques and encouraging reflection through talking about the task, while checking on individual progress.
- Knowing when, and when not, to intervene was perceived as an important skill in working with children in the early years

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Transition to school

- Although not the main aim for centres, staff thought it useful to familiarise children approaching school age with the social structures and general approach of school - for example, carrying out activities while sitting around desks and taking part in a designated activity (rather than one chosen freely) which they would be encouraged to see through to a conclusion. Such an approach was felt to facilitate the transition to school.

Staff

- Only three of the twenty-eight staff observed had a teaching qualification. This is interesting given that the project aimed to include a qualified teacher in all cases where such a person could be observed working with children in the centre when the researcher visited.
- The staff involved, who were predominantly nursery nurses, demonstrated a high degree of sensitivity and subtlety in meeting individual needs and in their interactions with children.

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9 Ensuring Quality for Children with Special Needs

Interviews with centre leaders and Regional officers analyses of Regional reviews

Introduction

How do Regions monitor and assess the quality of their provision for pre-fives across the whole Region, within individual centres and within each group or class? This was a question to be addressed by this project, not for the purpose of making comparison between Regions but rather to illustrate the range of provision in Scotland and to set issues of quality in the context of policy and practice in three Regions: Borders, Fife and Strathclyde. In order to explore perceptions of what constitutes quality assurance and to gain insights into quality assurance in practice, we drew on three sources of information: interviews with study centre leaders or their deputes about the steps taken to ensure quality of provision including that for children with special needs; an analysis of the reviews of daycare and related services for young children published by the three Regions concerned; and interviews with senior officers in each of these Regions.

There are two aspects of quality assurance for centres - internal arrangements and those which are externally imposed. Internally, the quality of pre-five provision is assured predominantly by the staff providing the service. These staff generate their own methods of ensuring high standards of provision. They are subject to external quality control mechanisms such as minimum qualifications, inspections and quality assurance devices such as annual reviews through which authorities offer an evaluation of their service. These external requirements arise from a mixture of legislative demands under the Children Act (1989) and Health and Safety legislation; of local authority demands and guidance; and of Scottish Office advice and minimum standards.

Quality assurance for local authority pre-five provision is the shared responsibility of education and social work departments in most authorities with nursery schools and nursery classes within the purview of education, and social work departments responsible for childminders, day nurseries, family centres and playgroups. The exception is Strathclyde Region where all provision comes under the auspices of the education department.

Context: the 1989 Children Act

The Children Act 1989 covers children up to the age of eight and sets out requirements in respect of registration, inspection, and review of pre-five care. This project is concerned with aspects affecting children of two, three, and four years of age.

Registration

The Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to register people and organisations who provide day care for children under eight in non domestic premises, and childminders who look after one or more children aged under eight for reward on domestic premises for more than two hours a day. Local authority provision is exempt from registration, as are

partnership nurseries and independent, grant aided and self governing schools. Thus the private nurseries, playgroups, and childminders researched by the project would be required to register.

The main purposes of the registration process are:

- to provide a framework which helps to protect children;
- to contribute to providing reassurance to parents using independent services who are arranging for their child to be looked after by someone who is not a relation and may be a stranger;
- to ensure that services meet acceptable standards;
- to ensure that people wishing to provide services for children do so within an established legal framework of requirements and conditions.

The changes required in the sections of the Act applicable to Scotland had implications for those who had previously registered services. All establishments and individuals providing full-time or part-time day care for young children were required to re-register. Registration requirements for childminders cover the numbers of children, safety of premises and equipment, records of children being minded and of people living in the childminder's house. Day care providers also have to give information about the number of staff. All providers are obliged to report any changes in circumstances, facilities and people looking after the children.

Inspection

Every registered provider must be inspected by the local authority at least once a year in order to ensure that services are being provided to an acceptable standard and that children are being appropriately cared for with facilities provided as stated on the register. Inspection should encourage higher standards of child care and reassure parents that the local authority is ensuring the quality of care provided for their children. Services provided by education departments are subject to inspection by local authority advisers and inspectors, and by HMI, while social work departments are responsible for inspecting the services they provide.

Review

All pre-five establishments operated by education departments and by social work departments are now required to carry out a review every three years. Reviews contribute to quality assurance by

(a) informing the public through the publication of detailed statistics about the services

(b) obliging the local authority to re-consider its services

(c) emphasising joint responsibility and partnership in designing and maintaining services through consultation with and between agencies and with parents.

In most cases, the requirement to carry out a review will require the establishment of a review committee, or such like, and co-operation between departments. A review has a formative evaluation function in that it should inform future service provision.

Each local authority is required to involve or hold consultations with other bodies (social partners in Euro-jargon), eg Health Boards, employers, trade unions, voluntary organisations and parent/user groups. This aspect of the Review process can also be considered as contributing to quality assurance.

Centre perspectives on quality assurance and special needs provision

Information from study centre leaders or deputies on quality assurance included reference to externally generated activities such as inspections and the policy set by the local authority and the support it gave to providers. Centre leaders were also asked about internally generated activities concerned with planning and monitoring, and staff development, and about the nature of special needs provision available in their centre. In view of the small number of centres involved (sixteen) this evidence is indicative of policy and practice but does not have the status that a larger study would merit.

Externally generated quality assurance

The heads of the five nursery schools and classes among the study centres reported on visits by HMI or by Regional inspectors/advisers. The overall picture is patchy with some centres having supportive advice from Regional advisers and others reporting a lack of attention from HMI (even though a visit had been requested) and sometimes also from their Region.

None of the centres said they had had an HMI visit in the last few years although two reported significant changes in the school - a new head, moving into a purpose built building - which they felt warranted an inspection. Nursery schools expected to have some Regional inspections but wanted these to be by people who were credible and supportive. One school felt particularly dissatisfied with an inspection on the grounds that staff were grilled unpleasantly by the Regional inspectors neither of whom had nursery experience (one was from the secondary sector). This was not a criticism of the principle of external quality assurance, but rather of the manner and lack of perceived expertise of those who carried out the inspection. Not all nursery schools had access to an early years adviser; one head teacher responsible for a primary school nursery class told us,

> *There are no nursery advisers in the Region and no inspections.*

Other Regions faired better with an early years adviser occasionally visiting the nursery or with very good support and inservice training provided by the Region.

Playgroups reported that their registration checks carried out by the Social Work Department (Education in Strathclyde) were likely to focus more on health, safety and security factors than on the curriculum. Day nursery inspections might also be expected to share similar emphases but one had an annual visit lasting about four hours which:

> *covered everything - safety procedures, first aid, equipment, staff:child ratios, records, and material provided for parents.*

Internally organised quality assurance

All centres make internal arrangements to safeguard the quality of their service. These steps usually relate to planning, monitoring and development; meetings and inservice opportunities for staff; and in some instances include a review of staff–child interaction.

The nursery schools and classes have the most comprehensive approach, with some producing an annual school development plan using a similar framework to that used in the primary school. Guidance is supplied by the SOED in relation to producing such development plans, and some Regions require that nursery schools produce them. This approach entails stating the policy and aims of the centre and setting out a development plan in the light of monitoring of activities over the previous year. In one centre, monitoring includes an annual questionnaire to parents and a fortnightly meeting to

monitor specific areas of the curriculum to check that 'we are delivering what we say we are delivering'.

Sharing information and talking through situations seems to be an important part of some nursery schools' practice. One centre uses the Early Childhood Environment Ratings Scale (ECERS) checklist as a basis for discussing with colleagues how objectives are being met. It also has a system of monthly one to one supervision of staff to discuss work, programming and personal development.

Not all centres spontaneously referred to children's records in the context of quality assurance but there was a suggestion that the Region should have a standard approach to record keeping with daily sheets available for every member of staff to note activities and any assessment information. This could provide a double check on the appropriateness of curricular input and provide a record for each child which could be copied to parents.

Helping staff to keep up to date was noted as a feature of quality. Staff attendance at in-service training courses was mentioned by each of the nursery schools and staff appraisal schemes are in the early stages of implementation in some centres. Playgroups have necessarily a more restricted approach to quality assurance; budgets do not allow for substantial training and in-service programmes but there are regular meetings for reflection among the workers:

> *We do things like skills and do think about outcomes but fun is important. If they (the children) appear to like an activity we note it for future occasions. We do try and think about what we are doing.*

For one playgroup, any decrease or increase in the number of children on the roll acts as an indicator of the quality of provision.

Partnership nurseries are exempt under the Children Act from registration but the centres in our study try to keep staff up to date with good practice through monthly supervision meetings, monthly playroom planning and evaluation sessions.

One day nursery uses Gail McCail's version of ECERS. This nursery has also organised mutual observation and criticism by staff who then meet in conference to draw up an action plan as part of their overall approach to maintaining standards. The centre head observed:

> *Everything we do is about quality assurance.*

This and other day nurseries had advanced planning on a monthly or annual basis, with formal development plans. One ensures that catering and domestic staff are invited to attend regular staff meetings, evidence of a holistic approach to child development. An important aspect of quality is staff training: some nurseries seek to extend training as far as possible within their limited budgets.

One of the private nurseries described internal quality assurance as essential to stay in business. An example given by the head of this nursery was that:

> *partners are involved in planning meetings and are continually trying to improve the environment and schedules.*

Provision for children with special needs

The centre leaders or their deputies also provided information about the kinds and quality of special needs provision available.

Centres providing care for the under fives are generally willing to make such adjustments as they can to support children with special needs. They respond to individual cases and usually work closely with other agencies and parents. Demands are varied and difficult to predict, and local authority provision is able to offer the broadest range of support through the education service as well as other agencies.

Between them, the study centres had catered for a very wide range of special needs including children with Downs syndrome, cystic fibrosis, asthma, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autistic disorders, delayed development, social-communicative disorder or simply a 'very low IQ'. Some children with special needs were just described as being 'slower'. Special arrangements were made as far as possible. For example, special diets were followed carefully; a playgroup ensured that suitable games and toys were available for a Down's syndrome child; a nursery school provided a standing frame and a wheelchair.

However although the centres would like to be helpful in taking children with special needs, our informants were also mindful of the constraints of their accommodation, facilities and expertise. A single storey nursery school reported having easy access for a wheelchair but also pointed out that the overall amount of space can affect special needs provision and that it is necessary to take account of what is practical within the accommodation. A private nursery with several children with special needs found that resources were really stretched and accepted that they might have to refuse some children:

If you cannot give the child all it needs, it wouldn't be right.

A difficulty noted by several centres was the lack of staff with relevant formal training. This is particularly an issue in identifying children who might have special needs. A nursery school referred to staff with SEN training who are "tuned in" and a partnership nursery has a trained nurse and staff with varying levels of experience with special needs children. Other centres did not have trained staff although some were aware of short courses which might be useful. Without such training, staff either depend on identification of need before children come to the centre or they use predominantly informal strategies - observing children, playing games with them, talking to parents. Only one nursery school had a formal observation schedule worked out which was mainly used to decide on the best form of provision within the centre and whether mainstream primary school was the most appropriate next stage.

Ongoing support may involve parents, educational psychologists, a home visiting service by teachers specifically for pre-school children with special needs, occupational and speech therapists, home tutors, medical support and auxiliaries and transport. Nursery schools and day nurseries are able to draw most easily on the services of other local authority professionals such as psychologists. Playgroups and private nurseries are not eligible for such forms of extra-agency support, other than for the purposes of assessing children attending with a view to determining whether a local authority place might be made available. One playgroup faced difficulties in securing extra help for children with special needs, whether in the form of money, advice, or toys and equipment, although the playleader said that in theory such help should have been possible. The group had eventually got advice from a teacher and obtained some relevant videos. One partnership nursery had got help from various professionals but had not required extra resources as yet. A private nursery identified the health visitor as being a key link in identifying and working with children with special needs but also pointed out that the health visitor was connected with the local surgery and did not visit the nursery itself.

According to the information from these centres, children attending nursery schools and day nurseries are likely to have their needs identified professionally and to receive more support than those going to any other kind of centre. Children at playgroups and private nurseries would have sympathetic reactions from staff but the very nature of these organisations preclude them from having easy access to a range of professional and financial support.

Regional reviews of services for children under eight

Section 19 of the Children Act 1989 requires those who provide day care to review the level, pattern and range of day care and related services for children under eight once every three years. Evidence of this review should be presented by Region in a report to be widely disseminated to interested parties. The project had access to the first round of review reports.

These reports provide evidence of the various approaches to review across the three Regions included in this study. Variations in the balance between different types of provision in each Region imply differences in approach. As outlined in Chapter 2, Borders has the largest proportion of 0-4 year olds in day care but the lowest proportion in education; in contrast, Fife has nearly half the 3-4 year old population in nursery schools. There are implications for approaches to quality assurance in that in Borders the social work department has major responsibility, while in Fife this falls to the education department. In practice, however, reviews require the co-operation of all groups working with the children in the early years.

The first reviews under the Children Act were carried out in 1992 and Regions are likely to modify their procedures in the light of their first experiences. Nevertheless, there were very positive outcomes to the review process. All the Regions met the basic requirement of producing documents which had involved collaboration between departments and agencies. In Borders and Fife, social work and education departments co-operated in the process and consultations. In Borders, the Early Years Advisory Group (established in 1987) already had inter-agency representation including people from the Health Board, the voluntary sector and Borders Enterprise. In Fife, staff from the Health Board had joined education and social work staff in carrying out the review but in spite of considerable effort it proved difficult to obtain as much parental comment as the Region would have liked and therefore an improved consultation structure is planned in time for the next review. This new structure will be at three levels: a directorate liaison group, an inter-departmental co-ordination group and a consultative forum. Strathclyde had vested responsibility for the Review in an education (pre-five) subcommittee of 23 councillors; it was not clear from the documentation how this subcommittee operated in practice.

The reported content of each review covered current policies and day care services for children under the age of eight. Other areas touched on by at least one Region, but not by all three, were staffing and staff development, the voluntary sector, equal opportunities, and the consultations carried out for the Review. One Region presented a population and needs analysis and all three concluded with plans and recommendations for the future.

Quality can only be assured against clear aims and objectives and therefore it is important for reviews to have explicit reference to a Region's priorities and goals. Policies for the under-fives were often embedded in general authority policy, for example, in relation to equal opportunities or multi-cultural education and/or community care policies. It will be easier to track the effectiveness of policies when statements of intent are separately stated in relation to the under fives just as it is easier to follow policies

concerning children with special needs when these are free standing.

Each Region includes in its policies some kind of priority for children with special needs. This might be for a place in local authority pre-five provision and may also be backed up by services such as a support scheme for parents or private daycare for children with special needs paid for by the local authority. Information provided both defines special needs as an important area for review and sets the foundation for subsequent development and monitoring.

The process of carrying out reviews has other beneficial outcomes in addition to closer collaboration between departments and agencies. There will now be a baseline of information against which Regions can examine changes and improvements. Even the concise descriptions of the services provided in the Region are useful markers for subsequent comparison. These descriptions also include much good news about a variety of initiatives within registered and non-registered provision which will be informative to those outside as well as within the Regions. In setting out the requirements for consultation to include health boards, voluntary organisations, employers' interests, parents and other interested bodies and individuals, The Children Act ensured a varied constituency of interest. The extensive consultations undertaken raise awareness among a very wide range of people of the needs of pre-fives and keeps this group firmly on the political agenda.

Although there were no indications in any of the review documents that parents served on any of the advisory or co-ordinating groups, parents were seen as the main educators of young children with the goal for headteachers, as expressed in one review:

> *To develop a partnership with parents to ensure shared aims for the child's progress and an understanding of the nursery curriculum.*

The quality of staff probably makes the most important contribution to the quality of children's day care and early education. Reviews take this seriously with two of those scrutinised providing separate sections on staff induction and training. Only one review seems to address both education and social work staff. It is important for both staff, and for those who employ and deploy their services, that a Region's approach to all relevant training is made explicit.

Some issues do emerge even from looking at only three reviews. In spite of guidance from the Scottish Office emphasising consistency between Scottish local authorities carrying out their duties under the Act, there proved in these initial reviews to be a lack of comparable statistical information by which they could be judged. For example, it would be difficult to compare expenditure on pre-five provision from information about budgets and grants provided in the review documents. What is clear is that funding for pre-fives can be considerable - the largest Region stated that the total revenue budget for pre-five services in the year ending 1994 was over £40 million.

Each Region tackled its review and presentation in a slightly different way, producing varying levels of detail and in language that was more or less accessible. There was absence of overt statements on some items (policy statements are varied in their content and detail), which means only that they were not obvious in the document, not that they were absent in the Regions. In two cases there was a profile of the Region which in one instance included details of population by area, age, household types, economic status and a child poverty measure (receipt of clothing grants). A reader will be able to form a clearer judgement of the quality of provision where such information about the characteristics of the Region is provided.

One of the greatest challenges is to produce a document which is thorough enough to provide sufficient, accurate and up to date information and at the same time is readable for diverse audiences such as parents, employers, elected members, staff, officers and voluntary bodies. Individuals in these groups will have different knowledge, levels of literacy, experience and above all vested interest in the content and presentation of the review document. Some were certainly better organised than others with the clearer ones having good introductions to signpost the purpose and content of the document. There is a difference between presenting a report to a committee used to dealing with heavy documents and writing for a broader audience. In at least one case, this difference did not seem to have been recognised. An indication that another Region had taken its audience seriously was the translation of the pertinent divisional report into six main ethnic languages.

Report writing is only one aspect of accessibility; another is the way in which people can make their views known in order to contribute to a review and to comment on proposed drafts. Two Regions described some of their consultative efforts which produced little response. Of over 25,000 questionnaires distributed to parents in Fife, only 8.6% were returned; two national newspaper advertisements in another Region only brought in 84 responses.

It is immensely difficult to compress a large quantity of information about services into a single document and in some instances separate consultative reports were produced, such as 'Quality Assurance; the quality process pre-five' (Strathclyde). At the same time, it would seem important that the procedures for quality assurance should be spelled out in sufficient detail in the review document for readers to have confidence that there will be careful monitoring of the quality of provision in each Region.

As previously mentioned, these initial reviews provide base line information which could act as a catalyst for regular monitoring and evaluation. The danger is that reviews become a three yearly chore solely for accountability and bureaucratic purposes rather than as a basis for action.

While for the purposes of this project, the Review documents need to be seen in the context of subsequent interviews with officials in the Regions, the production of review documents are certainly relevant to issues of quality in themselves as they can help Regions to identify areas for improvement such as enhancing co-operation between departments and improving training.

■ Discussions with Regions

Interviews were held with appropriate senior officers from education and social work departments. These Regional officers were very helpful in discussing their authority's position in relation to:

- inter-agency collaboration on quality assurance
- formal structures and procedures for quality assurance
- guidance to providers on implementation
- any issues arising from quality assurance activities to date

Inter-agency collaboration on quality assurance

Quality assurance for pre-fives necessarily involves inter-agency collaboration. Where there is not an integrated service, there is close co-operation between education and social work departments in ensuring good quality pre-five care. Co-operation extends beyond

education and social work to the voluntary sector including playgroups and to health services. Two of the three Regions have a well established, supportive, cross-agency group concerned with early years services.

Formal structures and procedures for quality assurance

Each Region is working on carefully implementing the requirements of the Children Act and making necessary adjustments to cover children up to the age of eight (rather than just the under fives). One has established a quality assurance unit and the others have registration units which also make reference to other quality assurance activities. The authorities are also aiming towards consistency in dealing with, for example, assessments of children and how references for childminders and playgroup leaders are taken up in different parts of the Region.

The Regions provide support (Educational Development Officers, Advisers, Child Care Workers) in order that establishments and individuals can meet the requirements of registration and/or inspection.

Each Region offers a range of inservice courses for teachers and NNEB staff to enable them to make the best provision for the under-fives and in one Region a local further education college is providing training for Scottish Vocational Qualifications in Child Care and Education for those working in the early years without any relevant qualifications eg childminders.

Guidance to providers on implementation of procedures

Each authority offers guidance to providers. Centres are encouraged to carry out their own self evaluation procedures through audit, development planning and implementation. One Region emphasised the role of staff appraisal as the complement to school development planning in the case of quality assurance in nursery schools. Another publishes examples of good practice to illustrate indicators of quality and also invites providers to give additional examples or comments.

One Region has produced quality pointers and indicators resulting from a year of consultation with more than 42 different groups. Quality pointers are organised under the seven strands of the overall mission statement of the Region: courses and services, achieving potential, suitable premises and resources, partnership, equal opportunity and social justice, access and economic growth and prosperity. In turn, each of the quality pointers are broken down into indicators of good practice with a list of examples pertinent to pre-five establishments. For example, in order to enable all individuals to achieve their potential, four quality pointers have been identified: staff management and development, playroom organisation, ethos, and assessment. Indicators of good practice for assessment are:

- children's learning and development is assessed
- staff keep records of children's progress and use this information to plan appropriately
- staff share information about their teaching and the children's progress as appropriate

Another interesting strand is concerned with fostering genuine partnership in education, and the quality pointers lead on to indicators of good practice in partnership with staff, parents, other services, and school board/advisory committees.

These pointers therefore offer a consistent approach for use by Regional inspectors and by establishments as a framework for development plans, establishment audit and self evaluation.

Quality assurance issues identified by Regional officers

The officers interviewed identified a number of points relevant to discussions about the quality of provision for children under the age of five. These can be summarised under staffing, curriculum, the demand for places, special needs, and the transition to primary school.

Staffing

- The requirements of the 1989 Children Act have necessitated additional skills of inspection to be developed by staff who are coping well in building up expertise.
- The level of qualifications of all staff is a quality issue but, of course, is also a resource issue. More teachers should be encouraged to gain diploma qualifications in early years. Nursery nurses may participate in inservice programmes organised for teachers but their initial qualifications would not meet the prerequisite level for diploma programmes, and they do not have comparable access to education department funds to teachers. If there is a serious commitment to good quality provision for children in nursery classes and schools and in day care, there also has to be commitment to training all staff. Of course if nursery nurses were better qualified, they could expect to be paid more. This is problematic for local authorities as a high proportion of staff working in early education are nursery nurses.
- In-service facilities for staff are easier to resource for those teaching compulsory school age children. Pre-five teachers have no access to government 5-14 funding which means that the sector is not on the whole well informed about 5-14 guidelines.
- The big turnover in childminders and playgroup leaders is very important for the quality debate. While the overall numbers may not vary there are new applications coming forward every year. This has continuing implications for training, and for the budget for training and inspection.
- One authority has built up considerable information about childminders which has been used to monitor aspects of the service. However, it has not yet worked out how other staff working in childcare teams can access this.
- One authority observed that most child care officers are women and underpaid for their work and responsibility. (No suggestions were made about any future action on this matter.)

Curriculum

- The curriculum for the under fives has risen higher on the agenda for all authorities. Some Regions have already taken a lead in producing curriculum guidelines. These have been developed in the context of the 1992 document from the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum 'Reflections on Curriculum Issues: Early Education' and on the basis of input from other sources, such as social work departments. These documents are largely of an advisory nature, and less binding than the 5-14 curriculum guidelines. (Ideas about an appropriate curriculum are also expressed in the 1994 HMI report 'Education of children under five in Scotland'.)

- There is some associated anxiety about the impact of the 5-14 development programme on pre-five provision. There is no formal requirement for pre-five providers to adapt their practices in ways conducive to children's future attainment of the targets set out in the guidelines, but providers fear that this may yet happen. The perception is that although pre-five activities might well relate to the curriculum of formal schooling there is also a need for a special curriculum for 3-5s as attendance at nursery is more than preparing a child for school.
- There is uncertainty about what will happen to many aspects of local authority provisions after reorganisation in 1996. In relation to the curriculum for the under fives, there is anxiety that the advisory services may disappear and that the SOED may take a more central role. One implication would be even less support than there is now for staff trying to implement curricula.
- The key to any questions associated with quality is the effective planning and delivery of the curriculum which in turn depends on the quality of staff. What will the effects of local Authority re-organisation be upon pre-service and inservice training and career opportunities for voluntary, nursery nurse and teaching staff working with children in the early years?

Meeting the demand

- Regions lack sufficient pre-five places to meet the demands from parents (or the existing provision may not be in the most appropriate geographical location within the authority). A dilemma facing at least one authority is whether to maintain five sessions a week for limited numbers or to spread the service more thinly and provide, for example, two sessions per week for more children.

Special needs

- There are no extra resources available for the additional tasks incurred by the 1989 Children Act for children with special needs. The Act requires local authorities to

carry out an assessment of all children from the age of two years who appear to have special educational needs. Children with pronounced, specific or complex special educational needs requiring continuing review should have a Record of Needs which will include a statement specifying how the authority propose to meet their special educational needs.

Local authorities are also required under the Act to make reference to arrangements for children with special needs in reviews.

- While all authorities endeavour to integrate children with special needs into general pre-five provision, uncertainties remain about how these children will fare when they start compulsory schooling. Staff:child ratios are not as generous in schools as in pre-five settings, and the emphasis in schools is necessarily on education rather than care.
- As yet there is no consistency in records being used in the pre-five sector and in school, or even between different pre-five providers. A continuous record might be considered important for all children but it is vital for children with special needs. One authority is piloting a monitoring mechanism to record when any step or action is taken to support a child's learning. This would be an essential component of quality assurance for children with special needs.

Transition to primary school

- It may come as a shock to some children to move from the protective environment of the pre-five centre to being one in a class of thirty with only one adult. Perhaps the gap is too wide and there should be more use of auxiliary staff in P1.

Because of the adverse adult:child ratios, 'crowd control' can be a major element of a reception class teacher's job.

- It remains difficult to secure the transfer and use of a meaningful record of a child's competences and needs. Reception teachers often underestimate the skills of their five year olds and yet may not have time to plough through detailed child profiles. At the same time there may be gaps in the records coming through to schools, preventing teachers from accessing key information about, for example, children's competence in early numeracy and literacy.

Summary

The project investigated how Regions monitor and assess the quality of pre-five provision, by means of interviewing centre leaders and Regional officers and by examining the first published review documents from the Regions. Researchers also used these interviews to gain further information about children with special needs from the perspectives of those in authority. These qualitative approaches provided insights into the issues of quality which were of concern to both centres and regions.

Summary of findings

Centre views on quality

- Centres adopted a variety of ways of assessing their own quality including development planning, monitoring, meetings and inservice opportunities for staff.
- Nursery schools reported uneven quality in the support and inspection provided by HMI and regional staff. Although day nurseries did not refer to any support received from social work groups, some Regional informants said that they were providing such support.

Providing for children with special needs

- Nursery schools and day nurseries were more likely than other centres to report that their children with special needs would have their needs identified professionally and receive support. Although children with special needs at playgroups and private nurseries would have sympathetic reactions from staff, these organisations said they did not have easy access to a range of professional and financial support.
- There was no data base of information about all children, their abilities and their needs being established within a Region. Such records as were kept were for specific purposes within centres or for tracking children with special needs. There was not an operational system to facilitate children's transfer from one form of pre-five provision to another, or from pre-five provision to primary school.
- Centres coped with a very wide range of special needs and enjoyed the support of various outside agencies. However, centre leaders noted the lack of staff with relevant formal training which was particularly an issue in identifying children who might have special needs.

Regional reviews

- In relation to pre-five provision, there was evidence of very rapid development towards more explicit monitoring procedures. Regions were developing clearer guidelines and even indicators and examples of good practice but these were not yet fully operational.
- The process of carrying out the reviews emphasised the need for very close collaboration between those whose main concerns are social and those who see their role as primarily educational.
- Each Region covered different services in its review and therefore it would be difficult to compare services and costs between Regions should this be desirable in the future. However the initial reviews do provide a baseline of information against which each Region can examine changes and improvements in its services for the under fives.
- Despite considerable effort , it proved difficult for Regions to obtain parental comment on pre-five services

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Regional services

- The budgets for pre-provision are large (though some might say not large enough) and each Region is taking considerable care to ensure that the resources are deployed to the best advantage for all children. That the needs of all children and their families are difficult to meet within existing resources is a dilemma facing those with ultimate responsibility for pre-five provision.
- Quality assurance issues raised by Regional officers were concerned with: maintaining levels of staffing and training; ensuring an appropriate curriculum for the under fives; meeting the demand for pre-five places and for the extra resources for children with special needs incurred by the 1989 Children Act; and the management of children's transition from pre-five settings to primary school.

Part Three — Issues of Quality

Part Three of the report draws on issues to do with quality of provision which have emerged from the findings and locates these in the context of the specific research areas for investigation set out in the first part of the report.

Chapter 10 – The Nature, Costs and Benefits of Pre-five Provision.

Chapter 11 – Learning in the Early Years.

Chapter 12 – Meeting the Needs of all Children.

Chapter 13 – Further Contributions to the Debate on Quality.

Chapter 14 – Implications – the report finishes with a discussion of the implications of the issues raised through the investigation.

It is difficult to avoid the political implications of issues raised to do with provision, with the training and deployment of staff, and with inter-agency work. We have tried to tread the delicate path of raising the issues without necessarily taking sides in the debate.

10 The Nature, Costs and Benefits of Pre-five Provision

Introduction

Consideration of the nature, costs, and benefits of pre-five provision raises a number of important questions. What are the economies of providing good quality early years services? What advantages and disadvantages do the various models or options hold for the partners in education and childcare – children, mothers, fathers, employees, employers and the community as a whole? How should responsibilities and costs be shared, and how should public spending be allocated? How can differently funded, or combined, services be integrated to provide a coherent range of services for children and their families? Comprehensive answers to these questions would constitute a separate study and could not be attempted in the course of this project. However, this chapter draws together findings from all the project's sources to consider the nature of the social and educational services offered and the way in which they are funded and organised. These findings address Research Questions 2, 5, and 6, which are concerned with the balance between education and social provision, the match of provision to the diverse needs and preferences of families, and the costs and benefits to parents and providers of the way resources are used.

Variety in pre-five provision

The providers of pre-five care are a mixture of Regional, private, and voluntary agencies, sometimes operating in partnership. There is therefore considerable variety in the funding of, and organisational and administration arrangements pertaining to, provision offered to Scottish children between two and four years old. However, what happens in terms of practice within centres of the various types is not necessarily very different. In setting the context in Chapter 2, we outlined the different types of service available across Scotland in terms of the traditional categories of 'childcare', 'education' and 'play and other'. However, in present times the distinction between these categories in terms of the nature of the service provided is not always clear, and some providers could be allocated to more than one category. David (1990) offered an alternative broad division into centre-based provision (including nursery classes/schools, day nurseries, playgroups, community nurseries, private and partnership nurseries) and family-based provision (including childminding, nannies and au pairs).

Access and facilities

Despite the existence of a multiplicity of provision types across Scotland, family constraints and restrictions on what is on offer within a convenient locality will narrow down the possibilities. Factors that determine parents' access to centres include cost, age of their children, local circumstances and what is on offer within a convenient distance. For example, day nurseries and partnership nurseries are not available in every locality.

It is clear that supply of places does not keep pace with demand, as almost all day nurseries and around three quarters of other group providers report having a waiting list

for entry. These waiting lists could be very substantial. For example, almost 40% of all day nurseries had a waiting list for full-time places which at least equalled their current roll, and in 25% of all day nurseries the reported waiting list was at least double the current roll. With the move in Strathclyde towards a locally based admissions panel, waiting lists for local authority provision in that Region - which accounts for most almost all of the day nurseries surveyed - are no longer centre-based. Nonetheless these statistics do give an indication of unmet demand, and will include children whose parents would wish immediate attendance and others whose names are placed on a waiting list in advance, in the hope that a place will become available when required.

For some children there is a mixture of concurrent pre-five experiences, as the survey evidence points consistently to some parents employing a range of services to help meet their childcare needs. A surprisingly high proportion of childminders (70%) report that they take one or more children to some form of group provision. Many childminders used playgroups and mother and toddler groups, and 89% of childminders who took children to other pre-five groups said that they helped out at these groups. Among group providers, a majority of all types of centre reported having children who also attended other pre-five groups, proportions ranging from just over half of nursery schools to three quarters in the case of playgroups. Since these findings arise from providers who are aware of families' use of other childcare facilities, they are probably an underestimate. However, figures relate to providers reporting one or more such children using their service, rather than to the number of children attending multiple provision. This area would therefore merit further investigation, particularly as it can prove difficult for some children to adjust to the conflicting demands of a variety of settings (Chapter 8 reports a discussion with a day nursery teacher who was convinced that the roots of one boy's disruptive behaviour lay in inconsistencies in the routines of his different providers).

With the exception of playgroups most providers in all categories surveyed offered a service on five days a week. However, both playgroups and nursery schools generally limited opening to the school year. Access to childminders, private nurseries, and day nurseries was usually (but not always) available over a period longer than the school year but normally not later than very early evening and rarely at weekends: childcare for parents working shifts or at weekends is extremely scarce.

Cost to parents is another important factor influencing access. Nursery schools and day nurseries make only a nominal charge, if any, which goes towards meals and snacks. Most childminders and private nurseries charge at least eighty pence per hour, and two private nurseries in the survey sample charged £3.20 or more per hour. The majority of playgroups charge between eighty pence and £1.59 per session, which normally lasts for between one and a half and three hours. With the exception of private nurseries, a majority of all providers offer concessions or waive charges in certain circumstances. Even among private nurseries, which have to operate without any subsidies, some 43% reported that there were circumstances in which they reduce or waive charges. Partnership nurseries have different funding bases from private nurseries, which enables them to offer full time childcare for as little as £1.50 per week in order to allow parents to pursue education and/or work. Nursery schools and to a lesser extent day nurseries were predominantly catering for pre-school children (i.e. children aged four and five). The majority of children attending playgroups were three years old, while childminders were the service most likely to cater for children below the age of three. The latter group were also catered for by private nurseries, where no one age group appeared to predominate.

As the project progressed it became increasingly difficult to generalise about types of centre based provision as there were so many overlapping features. Moreover, the style and effectiveness of any centre depends heavily on the staff, and especially on the head of the centre. Applying the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale to our sample of study centres showed that playgroups in particular showed considerable variation in the way they catered for language and reasoning, creative activities and social development. Although only one of the three day nurseries studied in detail employed a teacher, there was little to choose, on this scale, between the nursery schools as a group and the day nurseries. Based on information from the questionnaire survey, observations of children, observations and discussions with staff, and the use of the ECERS it would be reasonable to conclude that similar kinds of activities were offered in the various local authority, private and partnership centres. Consequently it is likely that the children in these different settings would have quite similar experiences. What was striking in visiting centres with permanent accommodation was the similarity of equipment and activities for children who were busy building, colouring, drawing, painting, playing in the home corner, doing puzzles, looking at books, listening to a story, singing – or of course one of the most favourite activities of all, watching other people.

The survey suggested that most children attending pre-five provision are likely to find themselves with access to suitable facilities and a wide range of resources and equipment for promoting their social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Information was sought on the availability of nine facilities such as cooking facilities, child sized toilets, and child sized tables and chairs. Although playgroups were poorly provided with these kinds of facilities, some - such as nappy changing facilities - are mainly relevant to younger children (just 3% of children attending playgroups were two years of age). Playgroups can be particularly disadvantaged where they share accommodation with another user as this tends to limit their control over their own space and to mean that they have to put all their equipment away at the end of each session. Although some have been very resourceful in using collapsible materials and adapting different kinds of storage space, they are disadvantaged compared with other pre–five providers. In terms of the availability of toys and equipment, childminders were less well resourced than group providers in respect of most of the items listed in the questionnaire, with playgroups again the least well resourced form of group provision.

Funding

Although some parents pay personally for childcare, most provision is funded through local and central government funds raised by taxation of the whole population. Scottish Regional authorities invest millions of pounds to provide relevant and good quality pre-five services and yet the situation remains that access to facilities is not equal throughout any Region.

Voluntary agencies developed provision such as playgroups and various other schemes to compensate for the lack of suitable local facilities. David (1990) comments that despite the Pre-school Playgroup's Association claim that many groups are now found in working class areas, the playgroup movement remains largely for middle class families. Playgroups require parental participation as well as financial contributions. Although charges tend to be lower than for private nurseries (see above), the double requirement of funds and time make it difficult for some families to participate. Playgroups usually have grants and other forms of subsidy (for example, provision of accommodation) from local authorities. They provide a very important service for three and four year olds where there are insufficient

places in nursery schools and classes or where parents feel that children need not start formal education (for example, a playgroup parent disapproved of children counting and writing, seeing the priority for playgroups as developing social skills).

Various kinds of partnerships have sprung up in response to local demands. The evidence from this study is limited but suggests that such partnerships as exist are functioning effectively. However, the absence of any partnership scheme involving an employer in the Regions covered in the project is significant.

Relationships between the voluntary sector and the Regions are delicate. The latter have a policing role, being responsible for ensuring that voluntary sector providers meet the requirements of the Children Act 1989 as it applies to Scotland. The voluntary sector is partially dependent on the Regions for funds, but provides basic services for pre-fives which otherwise would not exist.

■ Education and social provision – 'Educare'

Traditionally a distinction has been made between education and care. However, children learn and develop in a holistic manner, whereby educational and social progress tend to go hand in hand: child development cannot be neatly separated into educational and care elements. This is implicit in the 1994 HMI report 'Education of children under five in Scotland', which sets out ideas about the nature of an appropriate curriculum :

> the cultivation of children's natural learning processes through the provision of a planned set of experiences, suitable accommodation and appropriate resources by suitably skilled and knowledgeable adults.
>
> p2. HMI 1994

Provision for two, three, and four year olds is multi-layered and children move between one kind of provision and another. Nursery schools provide care as other establishments contribute to a child's education. The distinction between education and care is further blurred by arrangements in Strathclyde (which provides the majority of pre-five care in Scotland) where all local authority provision is managed and supported by the Education Department. The reality is quite close to Tricia David's (1990) notion of an *educare* system which offers high-quality care *and* education. Thus it is inappropriate to view provision as either purely educational or purely social. Nor would such a split reflect providers' intentions: it is clear that the providers surveyed and studied aim to provide care which promotes both educational and social development.

A special feature of pre-five provision is socialisation and learning to be part of a group. For example, among all providers, benefits arising from preparation of the children for school were mentioned less frequently than benefits arising from socialising with other children. This is a priority for everyone and is the main perceived benefit of pre–school experience. However, this in itself can be a useful preparation for school. This theme is further developed in the section on 'preparation for school' in the following chapter.

Some differences between provision types do exist, often related to the age of the children cared for. The very young have the benefit of more favourable adult:child ratios whether they are in the care of a childminder, playgroup or at some form of nursery. Four year olds at nursery school are beginning to move into the larger groups they can expect to meet after they enter formal schooling. Fewer adults are perceived as necessary as children gain more skills and independence in looking after themselves and adjusting socially – some of the prime goals of providers and parents.

Differences in staff' salaries and status persist and it is not possible for those without a relevant teaching qualification to be in charge of a nursery school in Regions other than Strathclyde. However, in practice some centres in other Regions are being run by staff with nursery nurse qualifications although a headteacher or depute is formally responsible. For example, in one of the nursery schools studied, the depute who carried the daily responsibility, was an officer in charge although there were staff with teaching qualifications on the staff. This case illustrates some of the ambiguities arising in teams with combinations of experience, craft and theoretical knowledge and different qualifications and access to in-service: the Depute can not become formal head of the nursery school. Also, a partnership project in Fife has an officer in charge. The evidence from this study (especially from the observations of and discussions with staff reported in Chapter 8) suggests that the cumulative experience and knowledge of individual members of staff are more important than the route into their job.

■ Costs and benefits for the community

There is no doubt that provision for the under–fives is costly but it is a cost which society considers provides long term benefits for the community at large (including Regions, employers and providers) as well as for individual families and children.

Regions

Regions see the benefits and expediency of providing for families. They seek to provide service on a similar footing to statutory education albeit in a less well funded way, seeing this as both a duty and an investment. They bear the main burden in terms of costs of publicly provided provision and some of the costs in the other types, for example through grants to voluntary sector provision. They also carry the responsibility for registering and inspecting pre-five provision not under their own management and may also provide training and advisory support, for example for childminders. Only the private nurseries and some playgroups remain self-financing through parental fees.

The actual investment in the various pre-five services made by each Region has been difficult to assess within the constraints of this project: the Review documents of the study Regions were not always explicit and each Region's methods of budget allocation and the information provided are idiosyncratic. One Region refers, in its first Review document, to an overall budget of approximately £100 million without providing any details of pre-five spending. This Region apparently keeps no separate budget for nursery education, which is accounted for within the primary school budget. Another Region sets out a number of budget heads and grants including community based/voluntary sector, annual grants to voluntary organisations, special projects and the Education Department. In the third Region the total revenue budget for pre-five services was clearly stated (in excess of £40.5 million). In addition, figures were set against voluntary sector grants including those for playgroups, and Urban Aid and Play scheme grants. The contribution to the voluntary sector comprised a very small proportion of the overall budget.

Given the variation in the ways in which resources were allocated to pre-five provision, it was difficult for the researchers to make any calculation of the cost for each child in each kind of provision on the basis of the figures published at the time of the study.

Employers

In the Regions covered by the project there are a few examples of partnership schemes involving employers. The centres studied in depth included a Partnership nursery set up

with European Community capital: here there was little evidence of employers fulfilling their obligations in terms of their status as social partners, although the EU Council Childcare Recommendation explicitly mentions employers as social partners.

Staff

Where do staff stand in relation to benefits and costs? As we have shown, all providers offer adequate facilities covering the appropriate gamut of activities for children in their early years. Those working in nursery education enjoy most of the same support in terms of resources, advisory services and inservice, as teachers in primary schools. However, with the exception of qualified teachers, the pre-five sector is characterised by low status, low pay and poor career structure and advancement. (Even the teachers would probably argue that nursery education has low status within their profession.) Centres in the private sector pointed out that it is difficult for them to provide inservice opportunities and expressed the view that society has responsibility to fund the training of their staff.

A need for more inservice training and development opportunities was commonly expressed. A majority of all group providers reported that there were areas of support or training which they would like to see available for themselves or their staff. In terms of priorities for further training and development, management tended to identify their own requirements in terms of management or administration skills, and referred to development needs relating to the operation of the centre, such as a need for staff team building or setting aims and objectives for the provision. More junior staff tended to pick up on specific areas for development, most commonly a need for training and support in working with children with special needs. Some playgroup playleaders and parents on the playgroups' rotas identified a need for more specialised and/or advanced training to be made available to them beyond the basic playleader course. There was also some feeling among local authority staff that existing Regional inservice was not entirely appropriate for local authority nursery schools, being geared towards primary rather than specifically nursery education.

Childminders are now registered and inspected annually, but generally there is still a lack of opportunity for formal qualifications and subsequent career development. Just over half of the surveyed childminders reported that they had no qualification related to childcare. (Furthermore, it is generally accepted that those responding to surveys tend to be disproportionately drawn from the higher socio-economic groups: this would suggest that the childminders who responded to this survey were likely to be better educated than those who did not.) Some Regions are offering some recognition for skilled and experienced childminders in the form of Scottish Vocational Qualifications in Child Care and Education. However, around a quarter of childminders reported that they would wish further support or training. There has been very little research into modern childminding in the UK or in Scotland in particular.

Priorities for admission to pre-five care

As there are insufficient places overall and serious shortages of pre-five places in certain districts, not all families can benefit from some kind of pre-five experience provided by the local authority. Even fewer will have access to full-time provision. Priority systems therefore operate for all local authority pre-five provision.

In Strathclyde, priority is given to 3–5 year olds with only a small number of places being available for children aged under three. The Region operates a five band system of priorities assuming that children will normally attend the centre nearest their home.

(Information about this banding system is published in a leaflet freely available.) Top priority and automatic admission is given to children designated by the social work department as being 'at risk'. The next band covers other groups of referrals including those from the psychological service and pre-school assessment teams i.e. children with special needs. Band 3 relates to children where there is family stress or where children's English skills are very poor. Bands 4 and 5 refer to children due to start school at the next intake and other children living within a defined area.

In Borders Region, top priority for attendance is accorded to children who have a 'Record of Need' as required by the 1989 Children Act for children with 'pronounced, specific or complex special educational needs requiring continuing review'. Thereafter priority is given to four year olds. However, there is a shortage of places in the Region with only twelve nursery classes, which can be attended for mornings only or afternoons only. Aware of this, the dilemma for the Region is how best to expand the number of children provided for, without any extra resources.

All children in Fife in their pre-school year, are offered a place in a nursery within the primary /nursery education service. Some younger children in priority categories (set out in Standard Circular 65) can also be offered places. As there are not enough full-time places available, provision is part-time with the exception of some whole day sessions for priority children. Joint education/social work department nurseries offer some whole day places for children of single parents, whose parents are returning to education or training, low income families and some places for children under three. Children with special educational needs have priority for entry to nursery or to special schools and classes at an earlier than usual age.

Around two thirds of private nurseries and playgroups reported that they did not operate a system of priorities.

Benefits for families

Pre-five provision offers benefits for parents in addition to an appropriate, safe and caring environment for their children. Centres may support parents in a variety of ways. Some support stems from the very fact of the provision of childcare, which can allow parents to work or study or to have some respite from the relentless demands of looking after young children and improves the quality of the time parents and children do spend together. Substantial differences between providers emerge in the importance accorded to a list of aims relating to supporting parents. Day nurseries are more likely to rate such aims as 'very important' than are other providers. (Even so, less than half of day nurseries - between 41% and 46%, depending on the specific aim - do so.) Allowing parents to work and allowing parents to return to education are also seen as 'very important' aims by substantial minorities of private nurseries and childminders.

Benefits to child and parent can also arise from parental participation in the activities of the centre. Parental contributions in the centres surveyed and studied varied according to their personal circumstances and wishes, but were also determined by centres' attitudes to parental involvement and access to facilities to accommodate extra adults. It is evident that some families have a lot of contact with the provider, when dropping off and picking up children, helping out in the centres (usually in basic support activities) and, in the case of playgroups, having an intrinsic part in running the service. Other parents may have little contact with their provider(s) other than through notes and telephone calls and any records sent home by the centre. These may be the majority of families and will certainly be the majority of fathers.

In terms of formal mechanisms for parental representation such as parent/teacher associations and management committees, private nurseries have notably lower levels of parental representation than do other group providers, among whom the modes of representation used reflect their varying organisational structures and philosophies. Some Regions' efforts at communicating with parents in order to ascertain their views in the context of the preparation of Regional Reviews of services had produced a disappointing response. Of over 25,000 questionnaires distributed to parents in Fife only 8.6% were returned (an improved consultation structure is planned for the next Review). Two national newspaper advertisements placed by another Region elicited just 84 responses.

We had no direct evidence from parents other than those able to talk to us in the centres but evidence from another concurrent study, which surveyed parents, showed that the periods available for good quality child care were too short to meet some parents needs. Day nurseries offer the longest opening hours on the whole and provide a low cost service but there are few of them and some Regions have none. It is easy to see why daycare provision is an equal opportunities issue:

> The contradiction between the present Conservative government's espoused ideal of family life and its recognition that the economy will fail if women are not enticed into the labour force is proving a difficult issue to handle.
>
> p4 David 1990

Some centres provide a range of facilities for parents' own use. An informant suggested that in some areas, the pre-five establishment could be the holding framework for society, providing a family service of drop-in facilities, extended hours and community services such as financial and careers information for parents. Although most pre-five centres are very unlikely to have all these facilities, they will nevertheless provide vital support and relief for parents in areas of rural and urban poverty. In such areas family stress would increase without the support of centres for the under fives. They could be particularly important for single parents, who may depend on centres for contact with other adults. In Strathclyde, two in ten households with children under the age of five are lone parent households - the overwhelming majority women (1991 Census figures). Strathclyde Region is large and accounts for 45% of the pre-five population of Scotland and 84% of the pre-five population covered by this project.

■ Summary

Pre-five provision in Scotland offers young children interesting and varied experiences in which they can develop socially, physically, intellectually and have plenty of opportunity to express themselves. Evidence culled from the survey shows that all providers were concerned to provide a high quality environment and put considerable emphasis on offering children opportunities to develop socially. Generally the provision supports the holistic development of children.

There is little known about the long term effects of the different types of provision and even less about how children react to, and feel about, going to more than one group of people outside their families.

There is a substantial investment in different kinds of pre-five provision in Scotland. Despite a variety of different types of good quality provision, there remains an overall shortage both in the number of places available and the times during which services are offered. Some families in particular are disadvantaged in pre-five support as well as in other areas of life. There is consensus, based on participants' experience, that pre-five

provision benefits the parents and children participating. What is less clear is how multiple concurrent pre-five provision experiences affect children at the time and subsequently at school. Associated with this is the need for an integrated approach to pre-five services facilitating communication between the different providers.

11 Learning in the Early Years

Background

It is often held that children learn more in their first five years than at any other time in their lives, with the pre school years laying a foundation crucial to future development. Certainly much of children's early years is taken up by learning to make sense of the world in which they find themselves. What children learn at this time is very important, and helping to maximise the potential of this period may be one of the most effective and beneficial things that we adults can do. Given this background, it is not surprising that there is much debate and argument about how best to proceed during these formative years in terms of pre-five provision.

Different traditions have emerged, allied to the various types of provision existing in Britain today, and reflecting the fact that pre school provision, unlike primary and secondary schooling, is not mandatory. Traditionally, local authority provision has come in the form of either daycare facilities such as day nurseries and children's centres or in the form of nursery schools and classes. The origins of these two types of provision are rooted in different philosophies and rationales. Daycare facilities, traditionally run under the auspices of the social work department, tend to adopt a holistic approach to child development which holds that the needs of the child can best be pursued in the context of the needs of the family from which the child comes. By contrast, nursery schools are run by the education department and traditionally see the needs of the child as an individual as central. Playgroups, on the other hand, are voluntary organisations which have largely emerged in response to a general lack of provision for pre-school children, and greatly depend on parents for their organisation and running. Private nurseries and childminders tend to be the most expensive forms of provision from the parents' point of view, and this has led to their having drawn most of their clientéle from among the children of working parents.

Against this background, the SCRE pre-five project attempted to explore issues relating to learning experiences and outcomes for children attending different types of provision. This included an attempt to address research questions concerned with how children's experience outside their family both built on their home experiences and linked with their future formal schooling. Did the experiences of children in pre-five groups bear any resemblance to what they would be encountering at school? In what ways might their experiences facilitate the transition to formal schooling, and how was their learning relevant to the 5-14 curriculum? Children's learning at home, and at school, is supported by adults who ideally create an environment likely to facilitate this: what contributions to children's development did adults claim?

Addressing the issues

The project set out to answer these questions by various means, the mechanics of which are described in detail in Chapter 3 on 'Methodology'. In attempting to investigate the nature of 'learning in the early years' the research design had to adopt a combination of

methods in order to have any chance of capturing information representative of the multi-layered and complex nature of what goes on as a matter of routine in the pre-five setting. Many of the relevant processes are unobservable, and staff activities may have a haphazard appearance which belies the planning, organisation and rationale for the centre's activities.

Much information about the aims of pre-five services and the various facilities and resources available to children in pre-five care was collected via the questionnaire survey of providers (see Chapter 4) which gave an indication of the potential of the pre-five centres' environments for enhancing children's development, and provided information on the curriculum and on practices in respect of record keeping and liaison with primary schools. The observation schedule used in a variety of study centres (see Chapter 7) provided insights into the activities, processes, and routines which children experienced and how these related to the 5–14 curriculum guidelines. This schedule also attempted to measure the involvement/concentration of the children. The use of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (see Chapter 5) allowed some comparisons to be made between group providers on a range of standard criteria. In addition to this, the comments of staff and parents about a set of photographs of pre-five settings (Chapter 6) often focused on learning activities in terms of organisation, underpinning rationale, and perceptions of good practice. Staff also explained the reasons for their actions in reflective interviews (Chapter 8).

These various sources provided a range of information on learning and development, including views on the role of staff in helping children to learn, reference to the importance of building on the home experience, and discussion of ways in which the centres sought to prepare children for formal schooling. Recording and monitoring procedures were also investigated.

Learning and development

From analysis of the various data sources we can say that all types of provision offer resources, facilities and activities with the potential to support a range of learning and development needs. These include: exploratory play; fine and gross motor activities; activities providing a basis for numeracy and literacy and promoting aesthetic development; creative play; co-operative learning; and activities promoting social skills, self control, discipline, and the development of values such as respect for others.

Parents and providers expect children's pre-school learning experiences to take place within a safe and healthy environment which provides them with facilities and activities which are fun. As providers (such as the day nursery nurse quoted below) often indicated, enjoyment facilitates learning:

> *If they enjoy it first of all they can learn a lot more about it, but if they are not enjoying it then they are bored.*

Many, if not all, of the pre-five groups and centres visited were noisy, buzzing with activity and chatter for substantial periods of the day. In the main, staff and parents felt that this was desirable, signalling that children were talking with one another, relating experiences and feelings, creating imaginary scenarios and co-operating with each other: silence was not seen as a prerequisite for learning. This is not to suggest that pre-five settings are, or should be, anarchic. It was evident that staff recognise the contribution they can make to children's development, and are constantly trying to ensure that children's attention is engaged, that they are participating (this subject is developed in the following section).

Providers indicated that the major benefits perceived to arise from children's attendance at their provision relate to general social and emotional development, as opposed to the attainment of specific cognitive outcomes. For example, among all providers, benefits arising from preparation of the children for school were mentioned less frequently than benefits arising from socialising with other children. Thus the most important domain for informants was children's social development – their relationships with other children and with adults in their first experiences outside, and independent of, their own family. They were learning to learn in the broader environment of the pre-five setting. Language and non-verbal social skills were perceived as important by both parents and providers in this context.

Between parents and providers, and between different types of provision, there was little disagreement over these priorities for learning. However, some subtle differences in the balance between various goals did emerge. For example, in response to two open questions - one regarding the main elements of good quality pre-five provision in general and the other the benefits to children arising from attendance at their particular centre - preparation for school had a higher profile for nursery schools and classes than among other groups. (This area is further discussed below). It should also be noted that childminders were less learning-focused than group providers. However, distinctions between education and social learning never became an issue since there was an implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumption of children's development being holistic and not divisible into separate spheres since, especially in the early years, all social and cognitive skills are interdependent.

The role of staff in helping children to learn

Ultimately the pre-five centre's curriculum depends on the skills and roles which adults as educators adopt. It was evident from much of our observations of and discussions with staff that they recognise the contribution they can make to a children's development, while giving due weight to the children's responsibility for their own learning, through experience and exploratory play. What came over time and again was the skill of staff in deciding whether and when to intervene, the most appropriate questions to ask when intervening, and the best ways to answer questions asked by children in order to maximise learning impact.

The scope for children's experiences was structured by staff in the way they organised the environment and the activities available at any one time, often preserving the right of the child to take part in a given activity or to choose from alternatives. Staff respond to children's requests and interests but also create the parameters within which children operate, providing, for example, bubble painting, singing, and counting: activities which require an adult or other children as well as activities which a child can do alone.

Staff were observed to interact with children in a skilled and sensitive fashion, Both their observed practice and the following discussions with researchers reflected their strong focus on child development in terms of what children are able to do at different ages and stages and providing many examples of thoughtful practice directed towards specific goals. Staff were not directly asked about any theories they operated with ('theory' in this sense being a coherent set of assumptions or beliefs underpinning practice), and did not couch their explanations in terms of a theoretical basis for these goals beyond using words such as 'child-centred'. Some used fragments of theories (such as those formulated by Piaget or Montessori) in common parlance or assumed a sequence of developmental stages suggesting that children need, for example, to handle crayons and paints in order to develop their hand/eye co-ordination.

Staff were therefore generally operating with common sense, experiential approaches which were not predicated on one particular theoretical approach to child development - such as would be found, for example, in Steiner schools. It was therefore difficult to track down a comprehensive value system except through its practical expression in a centre's activities. Centres were generally aiming for incremental progress, sensitive to the needs and stage of development of each child. In this way, staff in pre-five settings first of all accept children as they are and then extend their skills and knowledge 'pushing them on a wee bit further'. In this sense the education and support provided is clearly child-centred, incorporating sensitivity to the needs of individual children and recognition of the value of allowing children to proceed at their own pace and to follow their own interests, albeit within the constraints of a social group. On the basis of their observations and interactions, staff have notions of appropriate activities to introduce and encourage while watching, interacting, and tailoring the curriculum to suit individual children's needs, enticing them to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding and to develop their self esteem, and judging when it is appropriate to intervene and when to hold back.

Relating to the home experience

Many staff recognised the importance of the children's home and community experiences, and attempted to create a congruent and complementary environment. On the one hand, some of the observed activities were felt to benefit children by providing an experience which was not, and in some instances could not be, made available to them at home. At the same time it was generally felt to be important to relate the learning process to the children's previous experience. For example, several staff saw opportunities to develop language by linking activities to the children's wider environment. Staff and children might also converse about the home situation in abstraction from specific activities - for example, while stopping for a snack.

Staff took cognisance of the influence of children's wider experience on their behaviour, and in the course of several discussions staff assessed that certain children had acted as they did because of the influence of the home environment. Conversely, it was recognised that children's experiences in pre-five provision could affect their behaviour at home, in generally positive ways.

Most parents of children attending day nurseries (90%) and nursery schools (81%) were asked to become involved by following up on work which children had undertaken at the centre. This was also reported by around a third of private nurseries and around a quarter of playgroups.

Basic methods of communicating with parents, such as chatting when they called for their children and posting notices, were widely practised. More formal efforts were made by nursery schools and day nurseries, a majority of which specified producing a handbook and written reports for parents. Several centres noted the necessity of making specific arrangements for communication with working parents, and had adopted newsletter schemes to keep parents informed of the activities and events happening in the centre.

Meeting the needs of children from minority cultures

Although the importance of a children's home and community experiences and the need to create a congruent and complementary learning environment is widely recognised, to meet the needs of all children in a multicultural society implies recognition that these community backgrounds will vary. Associated with this is a need for all children to be

aware of cultural diversity. The project makes no claims for detailed investigation on this subject, but some relevant information was gleaned and is discussed here.

Local authorities are required to ensure that they have available data on the ethnic origins of the local population to ensure that the daycare and educational services in the area are operating in a non-discriminatory way (SOED 1991). This will also provide information relevant to the employment of appropriate staff.

In the survey carried out by this project, around one in five group providers but only one childminder reported having the care of one or more child whose first language was not English, this being more frequently reported among nursery schools and day nurseries than in private nurseries and playgroups. A wide range of first languages were reported, most commonly Urdu, Punjabi, and Mandarin/Chinese. Although around one third of the relevant centres reported that support was available to them in their care of these children, few specified the availability of staff or other professionals who spoke the child's first language. There no languages other than English were used in any of the sixteen study centres, although there were a few children who had only a little English. There is a tension in helping such children to adjust comfortably to their first ventures outside the family and providing them with opportunities to develop both their mother tongue and English.

Only fourteen group providers (around 5%) - mainly nursery schools and day nurseries - reported that any of their childcare staff were from an ethnic, cultural, or religious minority group, and only three childminders were from a minority ethnic group.

The figures on providers caring for children for whom English is a second language give an indication of the presence of children from minority groups and, taken together, findings suggest that many such children attend provision where none of the staff share their culture or first language.

Providers and parents generally feel it appropriate and valuable to familiarise children with the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of today's society. The research did not systematically seek to investigate practice in relation to multicultural issues but discussions with parents and observations of activities in the study centres do raise questions as to how effective practice is in this regard. Curriculum materials relevant to a multiracial society were not, in the view of some parents, available in every centre, and in the observations of staff practice no activities related to multicultural issues or using materials relevant to minority cultures were undertaken. This suggests that the curriculum in this area will need attention if a multicultural perspective is important for all children.

Preparation for school

Pre-five providers do aim to prepare children for school, but in the context of a wider purpose, often described as preparation for life: preparation for school was felt to be important, but not the overriding purpose of pre-five activity. However, while staff saw the aims of pre-five provision as being far wider than preparation of children for school, this was nonetheless often felt to be an important element of the experience.

Many staff viewed the development of social and interpersonal skills, whereby children learn how to learn, as their most important contribution to children's preparation for formal schooling. Familiarising children with the social organisation and mode of learning which they would later encounter was central to this. Children were being socialised into being pupils in a variety of ways including learning to listen (especially to adults), to sit still, to be aware of - and thoughtful for - others, and to concentrate while surrounded by many other people and stimuli. Thus, while the experience of freedom of

expression and use of the imagination were felt to be valuable components of the pre-five experience, as children move towards school age play becomes more directive and structured with children encouraged to see an activity through to a conclusion.

Despite this socialisation process, however, there exists a discontinuity of perception as to how children's learning is facilitated in the pre-five and school settings. For example, as previously noted, some noise rather than silence was treated as evidence of learning in the pre-five centre. Pre-school children are encouraged to learn through the direct experience of play and exploration in varied social settings. There were, for example, many comments from informants suggesting that children learn when they are enjoying an activity, when they are engaged with, concentrating on, what they are doing. Certainly it is very difficult to coerce very young children into learning although they may be tempted into joining in an activity when it looks like fun.

It was apparent that pre-five provision can provide a basis for continuity of experience for children in relation to their later experience of the 5-14 development programme. Observation of children in the sixteen study centres (see Chapter 7) showed that there were opportunities for children to become engaged in activities with content and process elements associated ultimately with Level A targets of the 5-14 guidelines. While this project did not focus in detail on what children were learning, they were often observed in activities relating to language and expressive arts, and to the development of pre-maths skills. Furthermore, in fostering values associated with sharing, and being careful of other people, staff were providing a foundation for subsequent religious and moral education.

Liaison with primary schools

Liaison with primary schools can play an important part in assuring continuity of learning experience, and is potentially helpful both in terms of preparing children for their forthcoming school experience, and in providing primary school teachers with background information which can assist them in their attempts to meet the needs of children.

Some form of liaison took place between primary schools and almost all the surveyed nursery schools, and between primary schools and around three-quarters of day nurseries. However, less than half of private nurseries and playgroups reported any form of liaison with primary schools.

Such liaison as did exist tended to be one way, with pre-five providers and children being appraised of and acclimatised to the school environment, as opposed to school staff seeking to familiarise themselves with children's progress and current stages of development. Only around a quarter of nursery schools and day nurseries reported that liaison which led to schools being aware of individual children's needs took place. This was even less likely in the case of private nurseries (13%) and most unlikely among playgroups (1%). Liaison over curricular matters was reported by just seventeen centres in total from approximately three hundred surveyed. The proportion reporting such liaison was highest in the case of nursery schools, but even here amounted to just 12%.

Some of the study centres would have welcomed closer links, with playgroups feeling particularly discouraged from undertaking activities intended to prepare children for school. Some playleaders reported that schools tend to be less than welcoming of playgroups' attempts to make their provision complementary in relation to developing pre-reading and pre-writing skills and in one centre even attempts to familiarise children with organisational aspects of school experience had been frowned upon. (This arose in the context of around half of playgroups rating preparation for school as 'very important' in terms of their aims.)

Recording and monitoring

The project was interested in the procedures adopted for recording and monitoring of children's development and activities. This was investigated both by the questionnaire survey and in interviews with study centre heads and staff. Staff face a great challenge in supporting continuity in children's learning from their early home life, through pre-five experience in settings outside the family to the first stages of formal schooling and the demands of the 5–14 curriculum guidelines. This process can be facilitated by making evidence of progress in children's learning available to primary schools through records kept in a centre or by a childminder.

Generally there was no standard practice in relation to record keeping and substantial minorities of private nurseries, playgroups, and childminders (in other words, non-local authority providers) reported that they did not keep detailed records. Among those who did keep records, practice varied greatly both in terms of their purpose, the amount and type of information recorded, and arrangements for access. Records were variously used to appraise staff, parents, primary schools, and other professionals of children's progress, and might play a part in evaluation of the centre's activities. Some records were primarily intended to ensure appropriate daily care, others to inform staff and family of a child's skills and achievements: the latter were sometimes couched in terms of the nature of a child's interest rather than the level of skill or knowledge associated with that interest and were therefore of little value for monitoring purposes.

Most playgroups and childminders simply recorded children's names and addresses, together with any relevant information on their health and perhaps food requirements. On the other hand, the vast majority of nursery schools kept records which made reference to the children's general development - as did two thirds of day nurseries - and a substantial minority (44%) also included information on curricular progress. Children's knowledge of colours was a commonly used bench mark of development.

Nursery schools were much more likely than the other group providers to pass on their records to primary schools. (It is probably no coincidence that nursery schools were also more likely than other providers to see one of the main benefits to children arising from attending their centre as preparation for school.) Very few playgroups or private nurseries reported passing records on or otherwise allowing primary schools access to them. However, from the reported content of such records it was apparent that only very basic information was generally kept, particularly in the case of playgroups, making such records less useful for schools. Also, as reported above, playgroups felt particularly discouraged from undertaking activities intended to prepare children for school. This might help explain why playgroups were unlikely to pass on to the school any records which they kept.

There is no consistency between records used in the pre-five sector and in primary school, between different pre-five providers, or even between pre-five providers of the same type. One centre head pointed out the potential value of a standard Regional approach to record keeping with daily sheets available for every member of staff to note activities and any assessment information could provide a double check on the appropriateness of curricular input and a record which could be copied to parents. In the present situation, however, it remains difficult to secure the transfer and use of a meaningful record of a child's competences and needs, with the result that reception teachers often underestimate the skills of their five year olds (and yet may not have time to digest detailed child profiles). Developments are underway in relation to record keeping for children with special needs: this subject is discussed in detail in the next Chapter.

Summary

Pre-five settings aim to support children's continuing learning as they move outside the security of their families for the first time. Providers indicated that the major benefits perceived to arise from children's attendance at their provision relate to general social and emotional development, as opposed to the attainment of specific cognitive outcomes, and helping children to get on with other people – children and adults – is perceived as important by providers and parents. Thereafter, providers seek to provide a varied environment which engages children's interest and attention and promotes learning across many domains. Creating a conducive environment for learning is a skilled task undertaken with considerable understanding by nursery nurses and teachers in a variety of settings.

The pre-five centres in this project did not impose a particular philosophy but rather adopted an eclectic approach to broadening children's experience determined by individual staff's expertise, training and experience. A strong focus on child development in terms of what children are able to do at different ages and stages was apparent. Centres were generally aiming for incremental progress, sensitive to the needs and stage of development of each child.

Many staff recognised the importance of the children's home and community experiences, and attempted to create a congruent and complementary learning environment. However, findings suggest that many children from minority cultures attend provision where none of the staff share their culture or first language. There is also some evidence to suggest that the curriculum in this area will need attention if a multicultural perspective is important for all children.

Pre-school settings are not constrained in the same way as formal schooling which 'intrudes' in the sense that it imposes what should be learned and how. Nevertheless it seems that pre-school settings usually provide opportunities for children to participate in activities and to gain knowledge and skills which are consistent with subsequent demands of the initial stages of the 5–14 development programme, even though this is unlikely to be providers' primary aim. Many see the development of social and interpersonal skills, whereby children learn how to learn, as their most important contribution to children's preparation for school, and familiarising children with the social organisation and mode of learning which they will encounter, can be important aspects of helping facilitate the transition to formal schooling.

However, although children's development might ideally be continuous, there seems to be little consistency between records kept in different centres and no apparent coherence between record keeping in pre-five settings and those used in the first primary classes. Findings suggest that the potential benefits for children which could arise from furnishing schools with information on their development and curricular progress would tend not to be realised. This conclusion is supported by a recent study by Pamela Smith (1994) in which teachers of primary one classes were reported as having low expectations of children coming into the school. The continuity issue is how to collect evidence of learning and progress in a way which is meaningful to the ongoing pre-occupations of children, their families and pre-five providers and which also provides helpful guidance and a record of achievement when children transfer to school.

Both this project and Smith's found that there was only substantial liaison between pre- and post-five provisions was between nursery schools/classes and primary schools; furthermore resistance from teachers was reported by some playgroups to the latter

engaging in 'educational' activities. Such liaison as did exist tended to be one-way, with the primary school being visited by staff and sometimes children from a pre-five setting, but without school staff making themselves well informed about children's pre-five experiences. Among all but nursery schools, the liaison reported to this project rarely focused on curricular issues: even among nursery schools a minority reported that such liaison took place.

Staff in nursery schools and classes have a higher expectation of the preparatory educational role of their work than other providers, although most providers would assert that they contribute to children's holistic development which would therefore provide a foundation for subsequent formal schooling. The data collected by the project can inform the debate on the perceived relative advantages of nursery schools and classes as opposed to daycare facilities such as day nurseries and community nurseries in relation to the 'learning' potential for children. These types of provision have different origins and may place differing emphases on certain aims and objectives. Nevertheless, in terms of the nature of the experiences that children attending are likely to encounter and the quality of interaction with their educators, they have more in common than not.

This project confirms that the basis on which many providers operate (albeit often implicitly) corresponds with most of the principles of child-centred curricula summarised recently by Watt and colleagues (1994) including: the education of the whole child; active and interactive learning; play as the main mechanism for learning; and recognition of the individuality of each child. Watt also observes the potential discontinuity in what should be a continuous process between learning at home and learning in school. What is required is a more detailed examination of how this is, or can be, effected in practice in something other than a top down way, with the primary curriculum determining the route for under fives. The question is how can primary teachers build on children's pre-five experiences?

12 Meeting the Needs of All Children

Introduction

All parents know that their children are special but they, like providers of pre-five care, are also aware that some children require extra attention. Research Question four asked 'What provision is made for children with special needs in relation to cognitive, physical and emotional aspects of development?' However, to address all of the issues raised by this question thoroughly would merit a research project in itself. This was recognised at an early stage, with a negotiated reduction in the project's special needs emphasis. Nonetheless it was considered important to address these areas as far as possible and most of the research methods employed by the project produced relevant information. For example, the observed practice included a number of examples pertaining to children with specific special educational needs, including children who are particularly able. (Details are provided in Chapter 8, which has a wealth of information on staff approaches to behavioural problems and several discussions relating to children with physical and/or learning difficulties.) Children with special needs are on the agenda for all national, regional and local groups associated with children in the early years and this area of our inquiries generated universal interest.

Acknowledgement on the part of staff that each child has individual needs was implicit in their interactions with children and explicit in their subsequent discussions of practice. Both reflected a strong focus on child development in terms of what children are able to do at different ages and stages. As discussed in the previous chapter, the general approach was to aim for incremental progress, sensitive to the needs and stage of development of each child. In this sense the education provided was clearly child-centred, incorporating sensitivity to the needs of individual children and recognition of the value of allowing children to proceed at their own pace and to follow their own interests, albeit within the constraints of a social group. Thus the observations and discussions of staff practice provided clear evidence of a flexible approach whereby activities and interactions are tailored to a wide range of individual needs. Staff in the pre-five sector expect to adjust to children's individual differences, working flexibly, for example, to help a child to become involved in an activity and avoid him or her becoming disruptive.

However, this chapter addresses issues relating to children having special needs arising from a physical, cognitive, or emotional/behavioural disability. We deliberately avoided the term 'special educational needs' when gathering information as this might have restricted comment to those children for whom a 'Record of Need' had been drawn up as required by the Children Act 1989 (details of this requirement are set out below). Many informants used the terms 'special needs' and 'special educational needs' interchangeably as we do so now unless otherwise stated.

Identifying children's special needs

When considering findings on this subject, it should be noted that the diagnosis of disabilities and other special needs, and even the ability to identify children with certain

special needs at all, is likely to vary between centres. For example, what is categorised as a language difficulty in a small centre could be viewed as a general delay in development in a centre with higher numbers of children and using a broader operational definition of 'normal'. Factors such as staff experience and training, the socio-economic characteristics of the area in which the centre is located, and the ages of the children catered for, might also influence whether problems are diagnosed as 'special' and the nature of the diagnosis made Of course many children with special needs, particularly those with severe difficulties and those whose needs arise from a clearly identifiable physical difficulty, will be placed in local authority provision on the basis of a pre-existing identification and diagnosis of need.

Less than two in ten centres reported having staff with specialist training of any kind, with little variation between the various categories of provider. On the other hand, staff with specialist qualifications were most likely to be found in nursery schools - over a third had at least one such member of staff. Centre heads are aware that the availability of staff with relevant formal training is an issue in identifying children who might have special needs. Without relevant training, staff either depend on identification of need before children come to the centre or use predominantly informal strategies - based on observing children, playing games with them, and talking to parents - to identify special needs. One nursery school used a formal observation schedule for children with identified special needs in order to decide on the best form of provision within the centre and whether or not mainstream primary school was the most appropriate next stage.

■ Special needs catered for in pre-five centres

All types of pre-five providers participating in the survey reported the presence of children with special needs. Between them the centres studied and surveyed had catered for a broad spectrum of needs, including children with asthma, autistic disorders, Down's syndrome, cystic fibrosis, cerebral palsy and encephalitis. Other less specific needs reported by our informants were: 'retarded development', 'a very low IQ', emotional and behavioural difficulties (including hyperactive children), social-communicative disorders, and speech difficulties. The degree of reported impairment was not investigated.

Day nurseries and nursery schools were more likely than other providers to report that their attenders included children with special needs, whether stemming from a physical, learning, or emotional/behavioural difficulty. (These findings relate to centres and do not give an indication of the number of children involved.)

Half of the day nurseries and nursery schools responding to the survey indicated that they had at least one child with physical disabilities. In terms of the comparison between centre types on the nature of these, the most striking finding relates to children with multiple physical disabilities. Half of the day nurseries reported having the care of at least one such child, as compared to just one nursery school, one childminder, and no playgroups or private nurseries. It is possible that Regional placement policy and parental choice feeds such children into day nurseries since they are more likely to be able to offer full-time placement.

Again, roughly the same proportion of both nursery schools and day nurseries (around two-thirds) reported having the care of children with learning difficulties. For playgroups and private nurseries the proportion is substantially lower, and only 4% of childminders reported caring for a child with a learning difficulty.

Four out of five day nurseries reported having children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, a much higher proportion than for any other provision type including nursery schools (almost half of whom reported this). As day nurseries are more likely to care for children deemed to be 'at risk' and children from families in crisis, these findings are to be expected, and again it is possible that Regional placement policy and parental choice feeds such children into day nurseries if full-time placement is felt to be required.

■ Supporting children with special needs

Monitoring children's development

Under the 1989 Children Act 'Children with pronounced, specific or complex special educational needs requiring continuing review should have a Record of Needs which will include a statement specifying how the authority propose to meet their special educational needs'. Such 'Records of Need' have almost a contractual basis for the authority. In respect of children whose special needs do not fit this description, however, record keeping seems to be no more, and no less, systematic than for children with no particular special needs. As discussed in Chapter 11, there seems to be little consistency between records kept in different centres and no apparent coherence between record keeping in pre-five settings and those used in the first primary classes. While a continuous record is might be considered important for all children, it is particularly vital for children with special needs.

Although practice observed in most of the centres in this study did not always demonstrate systematic and thorough record keeping, the Regions had all developed (or were in the process of developing) a framework of quality assurance covering all children under the age of five in daycare and education. One Region was proposing a 'minute of intervention' to provide a monitoring mechanism to record when any step or action is taken to support a child's learning. (Some children with 'minutes of intervention' will not have a 'Record of Need'.) Through these proposals it should be possible to track all the interventions taken by different agencies in the authority on behalf of individual children. A major advantage of such a scheme is that records can be passed on from pre-five settings to primary schools.

Integration

Integration was overwhelmingly endorsed by parents and staff as benefiting both children with, and those without, special needs. It was felt to raise awareness of individual differences and to encourage all children to accept these differences and to respect each other.

The Regions all had a policy of integration of children with special needs as far as this was possible. For example, one Region has as an indicator of good practice that 'Pupil integration with mainstream establishments is actively encouraged'. Another specifically requires 1 in 10 nursery school places to be retained for children identified by a psychologist as having special needs: all of these places are taken up, and some centres take more than this minimum. In some instances children are accompanied by an auxiliary and even quite severely disadvantaged children can be accommodated - for example we were informed that there is a blind child is attending one of the nursery schools.

Other providers also assert the need for integration. The Scottish Pre-School Play Association (SPPA) states:

> It is important for handicapped children that they are not isolated from other children at an early age and wherever possible they should be welcomed into playgroups.
>
> Conditions of Registration for Playgroups
> Borders Regional Council

However the term 'integration' is in danger of becoming a flag for many parties to wave although they may not share the same concept. It is important to see what integration can, and does, mean in practice. In this study, integration could vary from children with special needs participating with the rest of the group in all activities (unless physical circumstances prevented this), to individual or small groups of children with special needs being within the same building, or even the same room, but functioning separately from the rest of the children attending the centre.

A slightly different perspective on integration arises when considering experiences of pre-fives as a foundation for subsequent school life. Staff in particular expressed disquiet that high expectations were being built up of support comparable with that provided in the pre-five setting continuing into formal schooling. Auxiliaries, and the generally favourable staff:child ratio of pre-five centres offer a quality of support which is not usually feasible in schools. This is especially true of the extra physical care and attention which some children require and may continue to require, even if only for a limited time, once they reach school age.

Centres providing care for the under fives are generally willing to make such adjustments as they can to support children with special needs. However, informants were mindful of the constraints of their accommodation, facilities and expertise, and resource and training issues relating to the care of children with special needs were raised by staff, parents, and Regional officers. Nursery schools and day nurseries are able to offer the broadest range of support through the education service as well as other agencies. Playgroups and private nurseries are in a less favourable position to integrate children with special needs since they are not able to tap into the service of local authority professionals - such as educational psychologists - for support .

Integration is also dependent on physical circumstances. Access can be difficult for children with physical disabilities and centres based on a ground floor have an obvious advantage in this respect. There also has to be sufficient space to cope with wheelchairs and for children with walking supports to move about safely. Other facilities and equipment can need special modification and again those centres which had access to regional support and resources were at an advantage.

Curriculum

Sometimes there are physical constraints on children – such as poor motor co-ordination – which limit children's ability to, for example, use wheeled toys or to manipulate pencils and crayons. There are specific problems such as speech impediments which may have important implications for a range of activities. Limitations may be associated with more general learning difficulties which lead, for example, to poor concentration or lack of co-operation with other children or adults. In the course of the child observations exercise (Chapter 7) children were most frequently observed using materials such as paints and crayons, but children identified by centre staff as having special needs were less likely to be observed engaged in such activities and were most frequently observed looking at books and pictures. However, the numbers involved in this part of the research were very small, so this finding is tentative.

Staffing

Staff and parents were conscious of the need to employ extra staff to cope with children with special needs. However, it is not just a question of having sufficient staff numbers to cope with the demands of children with special needs. Relevant expertise is vital if their needs are to be met. This has been recognised by HMI (1994):

> effective provision for children with special educational needs depended on staff having the knowledge and expertise to make provision which took full account of the special educational needs of the children. (p.48)

Local authority providers are able to apply to the Regional authority for auxiliary staff to help out in these circumstances. As a result, often the least qualified staff are dealing with the most needy children. Yet the desire for staff training expressed by many staff and parents is difficult to implement. Funding for initial and in-service training is always a problem especially for those in private establishments. Any single centre may only have one or two children defined as having special needs. Each child could have quite different difficulties, each of which requires different staff training. As these children grow up and move on to school, the incoming cohort may include children with a different set of needs, new to the staff of the centre. Training facilities may not be easily provided across a wide geographical area and thus may be inaccessible to some potential students. Childminders operate as individuals rather than in groups and may have difficulties in finding out about training opportunities as well as finding 'child free time' in which to attend training.

Support from other professionals

Ongoing support may involve parents, educational psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, home tutors, medical support and auxiliaries and transport. Thus professionals from outwith the centre are important in supporting children with special needs, and nursery schools and day nurseries, being local authority services, are best placed to draw on these. Playgroups and private nurseries are not eligible for such forms of extra-agency support, other than for the purposes of assessing children attending with a view to determining whether a local authority place might be made available. Thus children attending nursery schools and day nurseries are likely to have their needs identified professionally - indeed, many children with special needs will have been placed in local authority pre-five provision on the basis of a pre-existing diagnosis - and are likely to receive more support than those attending other centres. Children at playgroups and private nurseries may have sympathetic reactions from staff but the very nature of these organisations precludes them from having easy access to a range of professional and financial support.

■ Summary

Although there may be consensus among parents, providers and policy makers about aspects of supporting children with special needs, some of the practical implications get lost when the philosophy is applied to individual situations. In this study, integration was widely endorsed but in practice could vary from children with special needs participating with the rest of the group in as many activities as physically possible, to individual or small groups of children with special needs being in the same room, or even elsewhere within the same building, but functioning separately from the rest of the children attending the centre.

Children with special needs are likely to be best catered for by the various agencies concerned with health, social welfare and education working in collaboration with parents to design and implement a programme of learning and support for each individual child. It was not possible within the scope of this project to investigate the extent of collaboration in this field in any depth. Research into what makes successful and less successful inter-agency collaboration in supporting children with special needs in their early years would be highly relevant. Regional authorities forcibly express in their Review documents their determination to provide comprehensive pre-five services to cater for the needs of *all* children including those with special needs. The extent to which parents, providers and regional authorities are willing and able to resource such extra requirements in practice, is a test of how special, special needs are and where they come in the priorities of pre-five provision.

13 Further Contributions to the Debate on Quality

The whole of this project has been concerned with issues of quality for children from two to four years old. However, two of the Research Questions focused specifically on quality. Research Question 7 asked 'How does the authority monitor and assess quality within the group/class, within the centre and within the authority?' and findings in this regard are summarised here. Research Question 8 asked 'What do participants perceive as good quality child care provision?' To an extent this Question overlaps with all of the others, in that perceptions of quality are relevant in relation to each subject covered. For example, staff perceptions as to the nature of quality practice have been discussed in Chapter 11, and staff qualifications and training, often held to be of importance to the delivery of a high quality service, are reported in the previous Chapter 12. There is therefore the risk of excessive repetition in trying to synthesise some of the findings associated with definitions, policies and practices related to the term 'quality', and so this brief Chapter is confined to addressing relevant aspects not covered elsewhere.

We were aware of the thorny territory involved in searching for 'quality in provision' especially as this is a relative concept dependent on a personal stake as parent or member of staff, in the outcomes of a centre's activities. We were aiming to identify discrepancies and common ground in perceptions about quality among the various interested parties (omitting, unfortunately, the most interested party of all, the children). Our concern was not to make judgements about the quality of individual centres. Our brief was to identify how other people made up their minds about whether, or not, children were having good experiences, and the factors deemed to determine those experiences.

This chapter starts with issues relating to quality assurance procedures and moves on to accounts of quality made explicitly by informants or inferred by the researchers from observations of practice and other comments by interviewees. The questionnaire survey produced general information on this subject, while the staff and parent interviews included discussion of the preferred ethos of the centre. We move on from a synthesis of individual accounts to frameworks for quality offered by policy makers; other typologies prevalent in current discussions about provision for the pre-fives provide further background.

■ Quality assurance procedures

Quality assurance procedures stem from both internal centre-based policies and practices, and from externally generated mechanisms. The context for the latter is set by the 1989 Children Act, which sets out requirements for registration, inspection, and review of services for children under the age of eight. Details of quality assurance procedures and requirements are set out in Chapter 9. The interviews with study centre heads and Regional Officers and the analyses of Regional Reviews of services raised a number of issues relating to quality assurance.

Notions of improvement assume a base line of information against which to measure subsequent progress, just as caring for the needs of the people being served suggests knowledge of what those needs are. It was evident that, as yet, no Region is establishing a data base of information on children's abilities and needs. Such records as are kept are for specific purposes within centres or for tracking children with special needs. Thus there was no operational system in the Regions studied to facilitate children's transfer from one form of pre-five provision to another, or from pre-five provision to primary school. (Record keeping is further discussed in Chapter 11.)

Quality can only be assured against clear aims and objectives and therefore it is important for Reviews to make explicit reference to a Region's priorities and goals. Policies for the under-fives are often embedded in general authority policy (for example, in relation to equal opportunities or multi-cultural education and/or community care). It would be easier to track the effectiveness of policies if statements of intent were separately stated in relation to the under fives, just as it is easier to follow policies concerning children with special needs when these are free standing.

Regional officers noted that if there is a serious commitment to good quality provision for children in nursery classes and schools and in day care, there also has to be commitment to training all staff. Of course if nursery nurses were better qualified, they could expect to be paid more. This is problematic for local authorities as a high proportion of staff working in early education are nursery nurses. Relatedly, the impact of the forthcoming Local Authority re-organisation upon pre-service and inservice training and career opportunities for voluntary, nursery nurse and teaching staff working with children in the early years is presently unknown. The turnover in childminders and playgroup leaders is high, with implications for the quality debate relating, for example, to training and inspection - including budgets.

The volume of new applications coming forward every year has continuing implications for training, and for the budget for training and inspection.

■ Accounts of quality

Providers' views

Providers were asked to rate a list of elements in terms of the aims of any high quality childcare service in terms of the opportunities for experience which such a service should provide children arising from a seminar held in Barcelona in May 1990. The list used was that drawn up by the European Commission Childcare Network. In general, opportunities to experience 'happiness' and for 'a safe and healthy life' were most likely to be accorded a 'very important' rating, while those least likely to be perceived as 'very important' were the opportunities to experience 'cultural diversity' and 'spontaneous and/or creative expression'.

Asked an open question as to elements of quality, by far the most frequently specified element was the provision of a safe and caring environment. Helping children to develop socially, emotionally, and physically, and providing a variety of experiences also featured prominently among all providers; and the ability to meet the needs of all children was frequently mentioned by day nurseries (53%) and nursery schools (43%).

Providers and parents on ethos

There was little or no diversity of view on the appropriate ethos for pre-five settings arising

in the course of interviews with staff and parents. The following were endorsed across all provider types:

- a welcoming and friendly atmosphere in which people feel comfortable
- happiness among staff and children
- a setting that is cosy and home like
- a place where all people are valued.

Fieldworkers perceptions of quality

The fieldworkers, immersed in the evidence from this project, were asked their over-riding impressions of what constituted 'quality provision'. They responded with terms such as: 'adults are nice to children'; 'lunch times are shared'; 'children are doing their own thing balanced by organised group time'; 'deliberately engaging children in a group activity'; 'encouragement to *do* rather than discouragement not to do'; 'encouraging children to reflect on what they were doing'; 'staff serious and thinking critically about what they were doing even in the small things'; 'pre-empting possible harmful things-keeping doors locked high up'; 'having rules or routines – linked often to safety; 'children learning to be systematic'; 'getting ready for school'.

Looking back on the evidence now, these comments cover the descriptions of quality expressed by informants: relationships, involvement of children who are learning and becoming both more social and more independent; a caring and safe environment; and skilled, thoughtful staff. All these contribute to the ethos of the whole pre-five setting as experienced by each child.

Ideally quality is pervasive and permeates everything that occurs in the centre. All children are treated seriously as individuals and as people. This requires staff to be flexible, responsive to changing needs and situations. There is a dynamism and busy-ness contrasted with periods of quietness characteristic of good quality pre-five provision that perhaps does not exist in any other organisation other than the family. Certainly many of the indicators of quality for pre-fives replicate the intimacy and homeliness of an ideal family. How do these informants' perceptions compare with other typologies of quality?

■ Other typologies of quality

As previously noted, Chapter 9 detailed the ways in which Regions approach quality assurance without actually including any definitions of quality. Their perceptions of quality have much in common with those listed above but appear in more formal terminology and reflect the major responsibility that any region has to ensure safe and beneficial pre-five provision. Legal requirements for registration and inspection mean that users almost take for granted that the health and safety aspects of children's environments which are detailed in The Children Act 1989 will be met.

It is appropriate to look at the Scottish Office views on quality for day care, educational and child minding services. A primary interest is in practitioners and registration officers having knowledge of research and good practice relevant to looking after young children. Annex A of the *Guidance for Local Authorities* published by the Scottish Office provides the voluntary and private sector with a list of factors which influence quality. These are quoted in full to make easy comparison with the views gathered from our informants and summarised above.

Annex A — Guidance for Local Authorities

Factors which influence quality:

- good adult to child interaction
- good child to child interaction
- adults who are able to provide learning experiences which are appropriate to the child's level of development
- a programme of activities which allows for both organised time and free time, including time for rest
- attention to health and safety
- a physical environment combining adequate indoor space and space for outdoor play
- continuity, experience and skills of caregivers who should be able to assist the child's learning and development
- appropriate equipment/toys, well displayed and organised
- the size of the group and numbers of staff

These factors almost match the examples of general aims and elements of quality provision given by providers and parents. The notable omission is any direct reference to preparation for school which certainly figured in our cases of voluntary and private providers.

Behind these factors are a set of principles to inform good practice in day care, education and related service for young children and their families. They have much in common with the aims of high quality services set out by the European Commission Childcare Network and used in the questionnaire sent to providers (listed in Appendix Table 4.31). There are a few differences which reflect to some extent the sources of the aims and principles but which also illustrate the difficulty in formulating brief, comprehensive, and readable check lists pertinent to the complexities of pre-five provision. In the European list, mention is made of stability in the environment; self confidence and interest in learning; dignity, respect, autonomy, independence; support as part of a family and community; spontaneous and/or creative expression. The Scottish list suggests more sensitivity to parents in their rights to information and as first educators. Looking now at another Scottish list in *Education of children under 5 in Scotland*, there are again overlaps but the principles also suggest: a curriculum based on continuity between home, pre-five provision and the early stages of schooling; and effective assessment based on detailed observation of children backed up 'a depth of knowledge about how young children develop and learn'.

Two further examples of typologies relevant to quality for children in their early years are from New Zealand and from the celebrated High Scope project in the USA.

An outcome of empirical work in kindergartens, childcare centres and playcentres in New Zealand, (Farquhar 1992) was a battery key indicators of quality identified by parents and staff. These covered five areas:

- social-emotional climate (eg The *settling in process is sensitive to the individual needs of parents and children*)
- health and safety (eg *good hygiene practices for both children and staff members are encouraged, taught and modelled*)
- curriculum (eg *Children are free to determine their own activity most of the time.*

Staff take their cues from the children's interests and informal observation of their needs)

- staffing (eg *Staffing patterns are such that the same staff have responsibility for the same group of children each day)*
- parent and family involvement (eg *New parents are informed about centre philosophy and programme practices).*

Some regions in Scotland are also producing quality indicators for pre-five provision, notably Strathclyde as outlined in Chapter 9.

The High/Scope Perry Pre-school project in Michigan tracked 123 African-American children from pre-school age (The last published report was based on the cohort at age 27). The study was carefully conducted but interpretations have to take into account the small size and nature of the sample (Only half the programme group received high quality, active learning pre-school programme over two years with at least 12 and a half hours per week of classroom sessions; the control group had no pre-school programme).The researchers argue that participation in an active learning pre-school programme creates the framework for adult success significantly alleviating the negative effects of childhood poverty. Four defining aspects of high quality emerged from the High Scope study:

- a developmentally appropriate, active learning curriculum
- an organised system of in-service training and systematic, ongoing curriculum supervision
- an efficient, workable method of parent inclusion and involvement as active partners
- good administration, including a valid and reliable, developmentally appropriate assessment procedure, a monitoring system and a reasonable adult:child ratio.

These are consistent with the findings from this project and with the goals of other typologies set out in this chapter.

■ Summary

Even if 'Quality' is an overused ẅords (it is interestisng to note where the word 'Quality' does not take a pre-eminent position since almost every social, educational, government, and document feels compelled to brandish QUALITY. *Education of children under 5 in Scotland* (1994) was remarkable for its discretion in not having a single heading containing the word), there is little dissension about what comprises good quality pre-school provision. It is evident that the potential exists in Scotland to maintain and enhance the existing good quality provision. There may however be some residual dilemmas and issues not least of which is how to provide a variety of good quality services to meet different needs within feasible budgets. Resources are inevitably limited but there are other considerations to take into account. These include problems of long term planning which is a prerequisite of ensuring quality provision. It is worth noting the claim made in the executive summary of the High Scope research findings when the cohort had reached 27 that :

> Over the lifetimes of the participants, the pre-school program returns to the public an estimated $7.16 for every dollar invested. (Schweinhart and Weikart 1993)

There are also difficulties in ensuring that all children have access to a quality environment when their location and own family circumstances make it difficult. and when parents may not find it easy to identify suitable, reliable and safe child care. As yet there seem to be no published guidelines for parents choosing pre-five care (and no relevant Charter) in spite of the Guidance for Local Authorities issued by the Scottish Office.

The final challenge for employers which emerged from a wide range of informants is how to provide the major requirements for quality provision: appropriate training and continuing support, in-service and career opportunities for staff.

14 Implications

Introduction

Although this project makes no claims for comprehensive coverage, it contributes to a better understanding of pre-five provision in Scotland and raises issues which will continue on the pre-five agenda in the foreseeable future. The most salient of these issues are briefly discussed in this chapter and complement those raised in earlier chapters in Section Three of this report.

Changes in the social and economic structures in today's society result in situations which directly affect the circumstances and environment that children grow up in. These changes in family structures need to be acknowledged. For example it has been calculated (on the basis of 1991 statistics) that in Strathclyde Region around one in five households with children under five are single parent households. (Strathclyde accounts for around 45% of the Scottish pre-five population.) Recent changes in employment patterns have decreased the number of people in full-time permanent employment and increased the numbers in part time work and on temporary contracts. Sunday opening for shops and extended evening shop hours put increasing pressure on parents working in the retail trade. There are more part-time low paid jobs in the service sector and women are returning to work sooner after having children, and in greater numbers. The net result of such changes is an increasing need for childcare and support for parents. As well as being able to earn a living, parents also need opportunities for self development and to avoid parental isolation.

Different types of provision

Parental and staff views obtained in a variety of settings suggest that there will be a continuing need for different kinds of provision for children before they go to school (and for some children outside nursery school hours). Day nurseries, childminders, private nurseries, partnership nurseries, playgroups and nursery schools and classes all make a distinctive contribution to looking after, and educating, children in their early years. Variety in provision is partly to meet parental preferences but also to reflect what is feasible in different geographical and demographic situations.

Taking into account parental cost, hours, benefits, preferences, and the age range of children catered for, as well as facilities, it appears that day nurseries and **partnership nurseries** are foremost in attempting to address the multiple needs of today's children and families.

Private nurseries provide a service to those parents and carers who can afford to pay. However, they are not available for the increasing numbers of lone parent households, the majority of whom live at or below the poverty line. Lone parents, in addition to requiring low cost childcare to allow them to take up paid employment, may also require help in confidence building and support for their child rearing. Some parents using private nurseries also use other childcare facilities such as playgroups and childminders. Even for

working parents, private nurseries do not necessarily supply the total solution since they tend not to operate over weekends, shift hours, etc.

Nursery schools provide a service on part-time basis, which is of little use in relation to the parental needs discussed above. They tend to target older children (three and four year olds) which may make some sense in terms of preparation for school. Unless other priorities are also taken into account, as in Strathclyde, no real inroads will be made into addressing the parents needs discussed above. Being serious about meeting the needs of children, and recognising the prime importance of parents for young children implies acknowledgement that meeting parental needs is part and parcel of meeting children's needs.

In view of demographic changes, playgroups could become of increasingly marginal significance, requiring a high level of parental input for the basic running of the service. Nevertheless, they have the potential to provide a quality service to the children of parents who have the time to participate in their running and who do not require developmental support. The ECERS data (albeit it is based on only four playgroups) suggests that the quality of playgroups varies. Playgroups tend to be a middle-class success story and of poorer quality in less affluent areas. The SPPA has recognised this and is tackling the issue through the development of a rating scale and staff development packages. There have also been schemes deploying a trained SPPA employee to support the work of the playleader and parents.

Childminders offer an important and normally flexible service, at a cost to parents. Although few childminders are available at weekends or evenings, the service complements other provision.

To review the above points, some working parents will need care for their very young children and therefore, childminders and those private nurseries and day nurseries catering for children under the age of three will be in demand; over recent decades such demand has increased. Provision needs therefore to be flexible and to extend beyond the normal working day (although any one child would be unlikely to require care for the full opening period). Current provision is insufficient not just in terms of the number of available places but also in the times when such places are available. The needs of children whose parents are working on shifts, at weekends or on night work cannot be met by the provision in Scotland to date. There are similar difficulties for families who may be seeking support for their young children outside the school terms. The vast majority of nursery schools and playgroups open for the school year (or less). However, 80% of day nurseries and childminders reported opening on a year round basis. However, this might not include cover for Christmas when nurses and other key service providers are working.

One outcome is that parents may use several providers concurrently. For example, a child may attend a private or local authority nursery and then pass on to the care of a childminder for a few further hours; or a childminder may have the major responsibility, in the parents' absence, and deliver the child being looked after to a playgroup for one or two sessions a week. Inconsistencies in routines between for example, home, childminder, and nursery school can affect a child's behaviour in some (if not all) of those settings. The effects of multiple care outside the home which have been intimated for children in their early years should certainly be explored further.

Where parents are able, or prefer, to be the major carers for their children, they may also seek some provision outside the family to further their children's development: to

help them to socialise with other children, to experience the kinds of activities and learning opportunities that are more difficult to provide at home, and to gain a measure of independence from their family. Some parents put considerable store in preparation for school for four year olds whereas others prefer to let children remain free of 'educational' pressures for a little longer. However, in practice choice is constrained by what is available within easy access for parents. For example, Argyll and Bute division of Strathclyde Region has only one local authority centre; parents are otherwise dependent on childminders, playgroups, and mother and toddler groups. Although rural areas may not be able to sustain extensive variety of provision where there is a small and scattered population of young children, the research suggested that nursery school provision was sorely missed in some rural areas. Playgroups are dependent on parental participation and will not thrive in areas where both parents are working.

The conclusion is therefore that there is no one form of provision that is no longer necessary. Rather it is a situation where variety in Scottish provision for children in their early years will need to be maintained although it may not be feasible to sustain every kind of provision in every area. It will however require a survey of parental needs and regular monitoring to ensure that there is, and continues to be sufficient of the right kind of local provision for each child who needs it. The current drop in birth rate and static populations are other factors to be taken into account in planning future provision for children under five.

Learning and child-centred activities

Traditional divisions between social care and education of young children are no longer tenable at either the theoretical or practical level. Observations of, and interviews with, staff show that they do not make a sharp distinction between care and education; they are supporting children's all round development. However the concept of *Educare*, a term used by Tricia David (1990), has implications for infrastructures, staffing and staff development, and curricula. Strathclyde has already addressed the point about infrastructure by vesting responsibility for all pre-five services for children living with their parents in a single department (education).

Anxieties were expressed by staff that the 5-14 curriculum guidelines would create pressure for more structured educational activities on children before they go to school and contradict holistic approaches to active learning pursued in most pre-five settings. We take the view that most of the activities observed and provided were quite compatible with the 5-14 curriculum guidelines and that the emphases by adults on the development of children's communication and social skills were necessary concomitants (and possibly even pre-requisites) of effective learning at any age. Bruner's model of a spiral curriculum is apposite: children may engage with any subject at any age and profit by it, provided that they revisit the same subject on more than one occasion to develop more mature conceptual understanding. Clarification of how the 5–14 curriculum guidelines operate in most schools could allay some of the unnecessary anxieties of staff working with children in pre-school settings.

HMI and some of the Regions are developing curricular guidelines for children in their early years. These are not likely, in the long term, to be contentious in the light of the intentions, practices and views put forward by providers and parents. However this highlights the delicate balance between local authorities and the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector might not necessarily welcome the intervention of the local authority but

at the same time needs the support of the regions. The authorities have no direct control over non-local authority staff (other than for registration purposes) and yet are to some extent dependent on continuing provision by the voluntary sector.

Learning in the early years is a preparation for life which in the UK will be for a multicultural and multi-faith society. Findings suggest that many children from minority ethnic groups are attending provision where none of the staff share their culture or first language.

Support for learning requires an understanding based on evidence of what a child can already do. There are no integrated systems of assessment and record keeping which enable all aspects of a child's development to be tracked. Different providers have different traditions about the kinds of records kept and most records are not used to facilitate a child's transition between one kind of education and care and another. Moreover, there is no apparent coherence between record keeping in pre-five settings and those used in the first class in the primary school. Consequently children's skills and knowledge are often underestimated when they go to school. Joyce Watt observed this potential discontinuity in what should be a continuous process between pre-five and school learning. Attention needs to be given to the most effective ways of assessing and monitoring children's learning in the early years in order to enhance their further development.

■ Staff

The opportunity to socialise and co-operate with other children is widely seen as of major importance for young children. However this should not obscure the central role that other adults play. Much of a young child's time is spent watching other people - especially how other children interact with an adult. This seems to be a way of learning appropriate behaviours, the rules of the social contexts in which children find themselves - and for some children, as indicated above, there could be several sets of rules to learn as they go to more than one provider of pre-five care. The quality of training and support that staff (nursery nurses, parents, teachers and auxiliaries, playleaders, childminders) receive can be an important contributory factor to providing high quality services.

Traditionally, there are quite different training programmes and career structures for nursery nurses and teachers but these distinctions are blurred in operational terms, with responsibilities and activities being shared on an equitable basis. It could be difficult to distinguish between the practices of nursery nurses and teachers, even when they were explaining their practice and justifying it to researchers. Current practice in Strathclyde challenges the traditional separation of the two professional routes, both concerned with fostering children's development, but other regions are limiting the responsibility given to officers in charge who do not have any formal qualification beyond that of nursery nurse. This has obvious implications for the professional status of both groups but it also has resource implications in terms of salaries and access to initial and in-service training.

The total number of registered childminders more than trebled between March 1983 and March 1992 by which time there were over 8,000 childminders registered to care for nearly 20,000 children (Scottish Office 1994). Yet childminders are a relatively neglected group in research terms. Local authorities make a considerable investment in training and registering childminders, many of whom build up tremendous skills and knowledge in working with the very young. What would help childminders to do their job more

effectively? Regions participating in this study reported a very high turnover of childminders who, like staff working in pre-five centres, present a constant challenge to authorities in terms of training and registration requirements. Need there be such a high turnover among childminders? Given that most childminders are in their thirties, it is interesting to consider the relationship between childminding and caring for their own children. Do childminders tend to give up the job when their own children start school?

In terms of employment, the entire pre-five sector is characterised by low status, low pay and poor career structure and opportunities for advancement. (It is no coincidence that most pre-five staff are female). We consistently found that staff expressed a need for more inservice, in particular in the area of working with children with special needs. Private sector providers also indicate that it is impossible for them to fund inservice training to any substantial extent and that the funding of such training is the responsibility of society as a whole.

■ Special needs and integration

There is evidence that children under the age of five and with special needs are having opportunities to participate alongside other children in pre-five settings. Integration is widely endorsed for the sake of all children - those who have disabilities have the same right to experiences outwith their own families, and all children need to recognise the wide range of individual differences among people in our society. This does not seem a problem for most children who are very accepting of each other's differences.

However, there are various interpretations of what integration means in practice and there are limits on the extent of integration possible for children with severe disabilities. Providers face complicated decisions; their knowledge of the wide range of possible disabilities is likely to be patchy and successive children with special needs in their care may have quite different difficulties. Examples of different kinds of successful (and less successful) forms of integration would help those who make arrangements for children with disabilities.

■ Further issues: mutual participation and male involvement

There are two further issues which potentially have implications for action. The first concerns employer and parental participation. There was considerable evidence of parental participation especially in playgroups and day nurseries and to a lesser extent in nursery schools. A dilemma is how to involve more parents in their children's pre-five care, not necessarily at a practical level but at least through mutual communication. Parents contribute in different ways primarily, of course, in caring for a child at home. Children spend the majority of their time with their families. Even a child having full time care will probably not exceed 50 hours per week outside the family and those in nursery school and play groups spend a larger part of their time with their families. Not only are they at home more, parents have known them longer than any outside provider and know them well. Parents also contribute to their children's development though attending functions organised by a centre working with children at a centre; some parents – especially in day nurseries – may participate in formulating policy and action plans. Regions might consider it worthwhile to offer examples of different good practices involving parents.

Another issue is the limited involvement of men in pre-five provision which is of especial significance for children - including some who live in all female households -

who lack positive experiences of male adults. Although there was a little concern expressed by informants about men in pre-five settings in relation to children's safety, both staff and parents generally viewed male involvement positively. The presence of men challenges traditional stereotypical ideas of male roles, enhances children's range of experience and could encourage fathers not to view their child's pre-five centre as an all female preserve. However, with only twenty males reported among over a thousand staff in the centres surveyed, there is an issue about how to attract and sustain male involvement for the under fives.

■ Resources and the political agenda

Pre-school provision costs money some of which comes directly from parents' net income and some from taxation at national or local level. All political parties currently regard the expansion of nursery education and care as likely to win votes but may be less confident of the source of funding for such expansion. It needs the most subtle political skills of the party leaders to ensure that provision for the under fives is high on their agenda but at the same time will seem a judicious investment for the electorate. Universal nursery education, for example, was estimated to require an extra £860 million by the National Commission on Education. One alternative suggested by Margaret Lochrie, chief executive of the Pre-school Playgroups Association, is that the government match the £100 million paid by playgroup parents and enable playgroups to meet common standards with nursery classes thereby offering parents choice for their young children. (Guardian Education 4.10 1994). Sonia Jackson expressed the scepticism felt by many concerned with pre-five provision:

> In this country, official pronouncements on pre-school issues still reflect the attitude that having children is an act of private self-indulgence, like keeping a dog. Most other European countries, by contrast, look on children as a precious national asset, the responsibility not simply of their mothers and fathers but of society as a whole, and are prepared to invest in them at a level which would be politically unthinkable in this country.
>
> p94 Pugh ed 1993

Despite the fact that a private members Bill (put forward by Nigel Spearing) which sought to require local education authorities to provide places for the pre-fives in nurseries and schools failed to gain its second reading in the Commons in February this year, perhaps things are moving on. As Neil Munro wrote (TES 22.4.94) Scottish Conservatives promise an expansion of nursery school places; Scottish Liberal Democrats offer a 'pre-school educational opportunity' for every 3 and 4 year old whose parents want it; the Scottish National party is committed to a nursery place for all 3 and 4 year olds and the Labour party in Fife and Lothian already guarantee a place for 4 year olds.

Taking all the signs together, putative opportunities have never been so promising for the pre-fives.

■ Long term effects of pre-five provision

The commitment of parents, staff and policy makers working with children up to the age of five is impressive; they are concerned to give children in their early years interesting and enjoyable experiences likely to promote their all round development. However most are working on the common sense assumption that effective provision for the under fives affects more than children's immediate development. It is assumed that what, and how, children learn in the early years has long term benefits for the ways in which children

adjust to school, make relationships and continue their learning in different spheres. The research evidence that this is so remains slight. Two studies - by Osborn and Millbank (1987) and by Sylva and Wiltshire (1993) - disagree on the relative merits of nursery education and playgroups but both concur that either of these kinds of provision offer children a better start in their school careers than no pre-five care at all outside the home. The study quoted ad nauseam in every discussion about the long term implications of pre-five social and educational experiences is 'High Scope', which as mentioned earlier refers to the experiences of fewer than 70 children with pre-five experiences (and a similar number in a control group) in one disadvantaged area in the USA - hardly the strongest evidence on which to base the future of pre-five provision in the UK. Longitudinal studies are difficult and expensive but so is the likely bill of providing pre-school support for young children and their families without knowing how effective different kinds of support might prove. The High Scope researchers claimed that

> Over the lifetimes of the participants (at the age 27), the pre-school program returns to the public an estimated $7.16 for every dollar invested.
>
> Schweinhart and Weikart, 1993

We, therefore, also have to recognise the possible costs arising from the personal, social and economic effects of not providing sufficient good quality pre-school opportunities.

Quality

There is a broad consensus on the purposes and quality indicators of pre–five provision and there are signs of greater inter-agency co-operation through reviews required by the Children Act. The first round of reviews provided a (further) stimulus for Regions to formulate guidelines and examples of good practice for providers and should provide a base line of information for future comparison. Definitions of quality usually refer to the users of services and it has proved difficult for some Regions to tap into parental needs and preferences through the consultative procedures undertaken. This reinforces the point made earlier that it is very important to investigate the needs of those families who are not using pre-five provision. Is this a personal choice or because appropriate provision is not accessible for reasons of cost, geographical location or opening times?

Some young children are multi-users, moving between different types of concurrent care. Accepting that this will continue to be the case, how can the quality of their diverse experiences be improved by linking and integration of services? The process of carrying out reviews has demonstrated effective collaboration between social and educational services at the policy level, but how does such collaboration take effect for individual children pre-five who have contact with more than one agency?

The quality assurance procedures being put into place by the Regions should, in the long term, improve the quality of pre-five provision. At this stage, an unanswerable question is how robust these procedures will prove in sustaining effective quality assurance after local authority reorganisation. Furthermore, definitions of quality are not static; what counts as quality in the 1990s will probably be regarded as quaint by the turn of the century. It is therefore essential to continue to monitor the appropriateness of definitions of quality and related policies as well as their implementation.

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Appendix 1.1

Advisory Committee

Margaret Carlaw	Adviser in Primary Education, Summerhill Education Centre
Bronwen Cohen	Director, Children in Scotland
Judith Duncan	Principal Research Officer, Scottish Office Education Department
Peter Glissov	Research Officer, Children in Scotland
Tom Greig	HMI, Scottish Office Education Department
Stuart Hall	Research Assistant, The Scottish Council for Research in Education
Wynne Harlen	Director, The Scottish Council for Research in Education
Maureen Jack	Educational Psychologist, Fife
Maureen Leck	Headteacher, Hillend Centre
Joyce Lindsay	Primary Education Division, University of Strathclyde
Alan Lindsey	Principal, Scottish Office Education Department
Heather Malcolm	Senior Researcher, The Scottish Council for Research in Education
Bart McGettrick	Principal, St Andrew's College
Janet Powney	Senior Researcher, The Scottish Council for Research in Education

Appendix 3.1a

Data collected from study centres (1st visit)

Centre	Parent/Carer Interviews	Staff Interviews (female unless indicated)	Observ-ations	Other Comments	IV †
1 Playgroup	2 females 2 females	2 Playleaders interviewed individually. 1 Treasurer and Parent individually	6 Target Children 2 Interval Children	One of the largest playgroups in region. Source of employment for village women.	3s 2p
2 Day Nursery	2 females jointly	1 Officer in Charge (SNNEB) and 1 Depute OIC (SNNEB) jointly. 1 Nursery nurse (SNNEB)	6 Target Children 2 Interval Children	Large centre in area of multiple deprivation on outskirts of large industrial town.	2s 1p
3 Partnership Nursery	6 females jointly	1 Teacher (teacher trained) 1 Nursery officer (SNNEB) 1 Nursery officer (SNNEB) 1 Nursery officer (Community Background)	6 Target Children 1 Interval Child	Part of a Regional/ private socio-economic regeneration programme. Provision for parents to return to education/work.	4s 1p
4 Nursery School	2 females separately.	1 Head Teacher (HT) (teacher trained) 1 Senior Nursery nurse (SNNEB) 1 Nursery nurse (SNNEB)	6 Target Children 2 Interval Children	Small town with high unemployment, little industry left in town.	3s 2p
5 Day Nursery	8 female parents jointly	1 Officer in Charge (SNNEB) 1 Depute OIC (SNNEB) 1 Nursery nurse (SNNEB)	6 Target Children 2 Interval Children	Part of Strathclyde's community nursery endeavour. Priority for adult returners	3s 1p
6 Private Nursery	2 Females individually	1 Assistant Manageress (SNNEB) 1 Nursery nurse (SNNEB)	6 Target Children 2 Interval Children	Private nursery in wealthy semi rural area with no local state funded provision.	2s 2p
7 Nursery School	4 parents, three females and one male jointly.	1 HT (teacher trained) 1 Teacher (teacher trained) 1 Nursery nurse (SNNEB)	6 Target Children 2 SEN Children	A non-denominational nursery serving a socially and ethnically mixed area.	3s 1p
8 Day Nursery	No parents present	1 HT (teacher trained); 1 Depute (Social Work Trained) with 3 Nursery Nurses (SNNEB) and 1 Student jointly	6 Target Children 2 Interval Children	Joint education/social work centre. Open throughout year. One of four such centres in Region.	2s 0p
9 Playgroup	6 Females jointly	1 Playleader jointly with parents	6 Target Children 2 Interval Children	Playgroup run in community centre in deprived urban area. There is one playleader; with high level of parental involvement.	1m (mix)

† Number of interviews with staff (s) and parents (p).

10	Playgroup	0	2 Playleaders jointly 1 parent (mother) on rota duty individually	6 Target Children 2 Interval Children	Playgroup run in primary school in a rural area. Usually 2 playleaders and 1 parent on rota.	2s 0p
11	Nursery School.	3 females jointly 1 female individually	1 HT (male, teacher trained) 1 Nursery Teacher (teacher trained) 2 Nursery Nurses (SNNEB) individually	6 Target Children 1 Interval Child 1 SEN child	Part of large school serving a disadvantaged area of rural town. School has unit for SEN children.	4s 2p
12	Nursery School	5 females jointly 2 females individually	1 HT (teacher trained) 1 Depute HT (teacher trained) 2 Nursery Nurses (SNNEB)	6 Target Children 2 SEN children	Located in new purpose built facilities within school in a housing scheme location.	4s 3p
13	Play group	1 female individually 1 female and 1 male, jointly.	1 HT (teacher trained) 1 Playleader (SNNEB) 1 high school student on work experience 1 parent volunteer & playgroup secretary	6 Target Children 2 Interval Children	Playgroup run in school classroom. Operates a pre-school pilot scheme for older children from the play group and neighbourhood.	4s 2p
14	Nursery School	6 females in two groups of three.	1 HT (teacher trained) 1 Nursery Teacher (Teacher trained) 1 Nursery nurse (SNNEB)	6 Target Children 1 Interval Child 1 SEN child	The nursery class integrated with P1. School also houses a playgroup and mother & toddler group.	3s 2p
15	Private Nursery	3 females individually	1 partner (SNNEB) 1 partner (Childcare Cert.) 1 Nursery Officer (Teacher trained)	6 Target Children 1 Interval Child 1 SEN child	Private 'work' nursery situated in a church hall in a rural town.	3s 3p
16	Partner-ship Nursery	2 Females jointly	1 Depute Project Leader (SNNEB) 2 Nursery Nurses (SNNEB) individually	6 Target Children 1 Interval Child 1 SEN child	Nursery has extended hours for children from 6 months to school age. Partnership between District and Regional Councils.	3s 1p
Totals		57 Female, 2 Male = 59	49 Female, 1 Male = 50	96 Targets 23 Interval 8 SEN = 127		45s 23p 1mix = 69

Appendix 3.1b

Data collected from study centres (2nd visit)

Centre	Staff Interviews about: Special Needs & Quality Assurance	Target Adult Observations and Discussions †
1 Playgroup	Playleader	1 Playleader
2 Day Nursery	Officer in Charge	2 Nursery officers
3 Partnership Nursery	Officer in Charge	2 Childcare worker
4 Nursery School	Head Teacher	2 Nursery nurses
5 Day Nursery	Officer in Charge	1 Officer in Charge (NNEB), 1 Nursery officer
6 Private Nursery	Officer in Charge	2 Childcare workers
7 Nursery School	Head Teacher	2 Nursery nurses
8 Day Nursery	Depute Officer in Charge	1 Teacher, 1 Nursery nurse
9 Play Group	Playleader	1 Playleader
10 Play Group	Playleader	1 Playleader (SPPA)
11 Nursery School.	Head Teacher	1 Teacher, 1 Nursery nurse
12 Nursery School	Depute Head Teacher	2 Nursery nurses
13 Play group	Head Teacher	1 Playleader, 1 YTS student
14 Nursery School	Head Teacher	1 Teacher (temp), 1 Nursery nurse (NNEB)
15 Private Nursery	Senior Partner	2 Partners (both with childcare certificates)
16 Partnership Nursery	Officer in Charge	2 Nursery officers
Total NB: **An ECERS-profile also exists for each centre.**	**15 Interviews:** 6 (depute) Officers in Charge, 6 (depute) Head Teachers, 2 Playleaders 1 Partner	**26 observ's & discussions:** 14 Nursery Officers/Nurses 4 Childcare Workers 2 Partners 1 OiC 3 Teachers 3 Playleaders 1 Student

† All Nursery - Nurses, - Officers and Childcare Workers have SNNEB, unless otherwise stated.

Appendix 3.2

Operational definitions & associated bands of experience in activities (child observations)

Content areas:

C*	Descriptor	Operational definition
1:	Living things:	Caring for or learning about animals, fish, insects
2:	Flowers, fruit and vegetables:	Growing plants
3:	Construction materials:	Lego, Mechano, wooden bricks, straw construction, pipe cleaners, boxes, gluing materials, etc.
4:	Investigation materials:	Things to melt, dissolve, float, sort, and take apart
5:	Musical instruments:	Obvious, but can include pots, lids, spoons, etc.
6:	Bulbs & batteries:	Electrical circuit components generally; include light switches
7:	Wheeled toys:	Trikes, carts, scooters, etc.
8:	Clockwork toys:	Trains, watches
9:	Books and pictures:	Large, small, wall mounted, displayed on shelf or whatever
10:	Weather & sky:	Obvious references to weather conditions; includes pirates on the open sea.
11:	Sand:	Using the sand-pit, dry or wet
12:	Water:	Water tray or sink, experimenting, playing, washing; include washing of hands?
13:	Time, day, date:	Include relevant songs and snack/ break announcements
14:	Festivals:	Multi-cultural favourite
15:	People in their lives:	Often seen in role playing: families, nurses and doctors, fire fighters, shop keepers, etc. A broad category.
16:	Food, preparing & eating:	Cutting up, rolling out, etc. Include pretend feeding the doll and pretend cooking
17:	Story or poem read aloud:	Include children and adults 'reading' from picture books
18:	Paints, crayons, felt tips, etc.:	Art corner - materials for aesthetic self-expression; too many to mention
19:	Dolls, puppets:	Can be used in all sorts of contexts
20:	Money- coins:	Often found in 'shop', 'post office', but also equivalence, change
21:	Rule and position based games:	Activities/ games involving directions, rules and position

* Code/ identifier

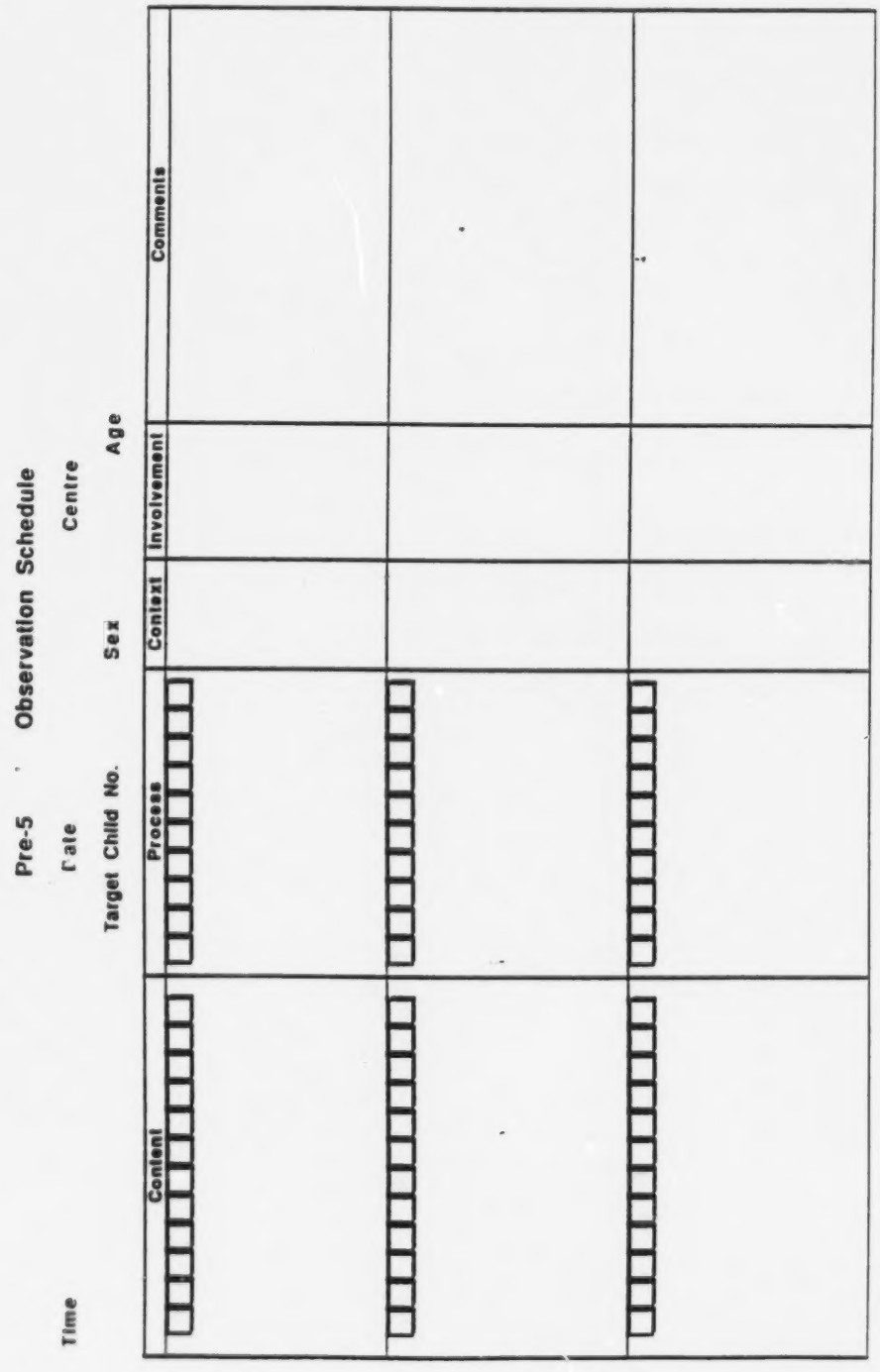
Process areas:

C*	Descriptor	Operational definition	Area
a:	Observing:	Looking at somebody or something in an attentive way, without physical consequences, perhaps while doing something else - looking for physical outcome would constitute 'k'	L/Æ/A
b:	Caring for living things:	Anything to do with animals or plants	L/Æ
c:	Making/ attending to sounds:	Not singing, which is 'n'	A/E
d:	Dancing/ moving to music:	Doesn't include involvement with nursery rhyme actions	A
e:	Asking questions:	Asking child or adult; part of 2-way communication	L
f:	Suggesting reasons:	Part of 2-way communication	L
g:	Drawing, painting, modelling, printing:	Concrete self-expressive processes	A
h:	Describing:	Conversational or in response to adult question; incl. pretend play	L/Æ
i:	Responding to story/ poem - comprehension:	This item refers to nursery rhymes and stories, eg shouting out to the characters in the story or asking the adult questions about the story	L
j:	Talking about a personal experience/ feeling:	Past events outside the centre or situations within the centre, eg conflicts; Could overlap with 'h'?	L/R
k:	Experimenting:	Manipulating materials to play with various possible outcomes; it can be exploratory and open ended, or very goal oriented	E
l:	Role play, dressing up:	Taking on the roles of people or imaginary characters	A/L
m:	Using dolls/ puppets to communicate:	As item 'l' this includes much 'pretend' play	L/A
n:	Singing:	There is some overlap with item 'i' though music or rhythm in some form has to be present; NOT 'c'	A
o:	Watching, imitating or repeating movements:	Some overlap with items 'a' & 'i' but this can also occur during pretend play	L/A/R
p:	Grouping, eg colours:	Putting various materials into (existing) groups, eg making patterns from coloured wooden/ plastic pieces or blocks	M/E
q:	Counting:	Self explanatory, though sorting according to number could also come under this item; include nursery rhymes	M
r:	Measuring/ stacking:	Arranging objects by length, height, volume	M
s:	Sorting objects by shape:	Jig-saws and other games involving putting various shapes into their places	M
t:	Building/ construction:	Putting things together to transcend the individual parts and form a new structure	E
u:	Gross movement of the body:	Running, stretching, balancing, jumping and playing on large scale equipment like slides, trampolines, swings, etc.	A
v:	Physical activity with lesser sized equipment:	Activities using small and medium sized equipment, eg hammering, using screwdriver, weaving, sewing, etc.	E/A
w:	Tidying up:	Putting things in their 'rightful' place from the child's point of view	R/M
x:	Looking at books:	Looking at pictures, pretend reading, showing pictures to others; NOT flicking through to pass the time	L
y:	Writing - anything:	Include doodling, 'scribbling' and pretend writing and marking objects to signify ownership or anything else like that	L

* Code/ identifier

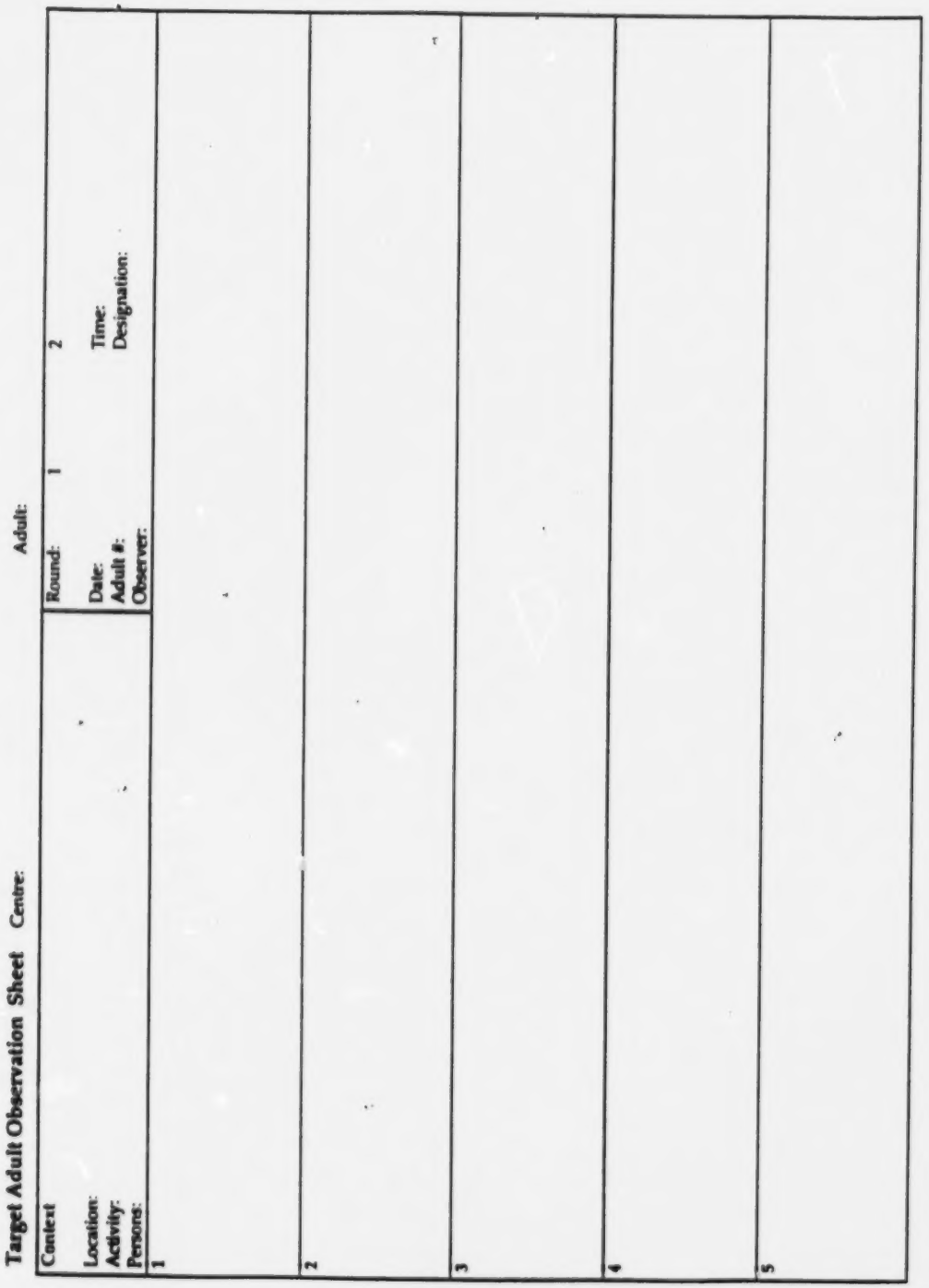
Appendix 3.3

Child observation recording sheet



Appendix 3.4

Adult Observation Sheet



Appendix 4

Table 4.1 *Facilities*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Hand washing facilities	100	98	100	100	97
Bath facilities	10	52	32	0	80
Child sized toilets	96	80	68	26	16
Nappy changing facilities	15	87	45	13	81
Cloakroom	96	87	87	75	43
Cooking facilities	91	91	87	67	87
Rest/sleeping area*	18	67	58	4	90
Washing machine	31	98	58	5	92
Child sized tables/chairs	100	98	100	96	68
N=	67	46	31	159	185

* Not necessarily a specifically designated area

Table 4.2 *Toys and equipment*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Picture books	100	100	100	100	100
Paint materials	100	100	100	100	89
Sand play equipment	100	100	97	86	45
Jigsaws and puzzles	100	100	100	99	100
House corner	100	100	100	97	41
Miniature toys	99	96	94	79	80
Work bench	79	65	42	31	18
Television	87	98	61	19	99
Wheeled toys	96	100	97	78	90
Outdoor play area	88	87	87	50	96
Large construction toys	100	100	100	92	80
Large physical playthings	96	100	97	94	58
Reading books	93	94	97	95	99
Water play equipment	100	100	97	90	62
Modelling play materials	100	100	97	92	67
Soft play area	33	57	52	16	30
Play shop	84	89	90	75	39
Dressing up materials	100	100	94	94	71
Wood working tools	79	67	29	28	10
Computer	67	46	13	4	45
Musical instruments	99	98	100	90	72
Measuring instruments/equipment	79	87	74	37	32
Small construction toys	100	98	100	99	94
N=	67	46	31	159	185

Table 4.3 *Trips and visits*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Shops/parks/local facilities	87	87	58	65	75
Zoos /farms/museums galleries	70	74	26	52	25
Theatres and cinemas	24	11	13	16	4
Libraries	16	17	23	16	13
Children's own homes	2	2	0	0	3
Other	31	26	16	13	16
No trips or visits	9	9	45	26	19
N=	66	45	30	159	179

Table 4.4 *Record content*

Content	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Information on children's general development	86	65	36	0	9
Information on children's health	73	67	45	70	55
Information on children's dietary requirements	53	51	42	30	36
Curriculum progress	44	20	19	2	0
Family background	19	38	0	4	4
Information provided by parents	16	2	3	4	4
Other pre-5 group attendance	3	7	0	3	1
No records kept	5	9	36	24	36
N=	67	45	31	158	182

Table 4.5 *Access to records*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Parents	93	89	55	27	39
School	72	18	10	3	1
Other professionals	31	44	26	11	20
Admissions panels	2	4	0	1	0
Others	16	20	3	15	4
N=	67	45	31	158	182

Table 4.6 *Nature of primary school liaison*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %
Children visit primary schools	58	48	23	27
Staff visit primary schools	48	46	19	8
Regular staff contacts	54	39	7	11
Children have induction sessions	9	11	0	1
Reports/information on children passed on	22	11	3	1
School teachers visit pre-5 centre	0	0	0	17
Work/co-op on curriculum	12	11	7	1
Other contact	26	13	10	5
No contact	3	28	64	55
N=	65	46	30	157

Table 4.7 *Liaison with associations*

	Type of contact	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Scottish association of family centres	No contact	97	57	100	99	Not asked
	Support	3	35	0	1	
	Other contact	0	9	0	1	
Scottish pre-school playgroup association	No contact	72	61	48	7	Not asked
	Support	24	24	26	34	
	Other contact	5	15	26	59	
Scottish childminding association	No contact	Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	Not asked	16
	Support					58
	Other contact					26
N=		67	46	31	159	185

Table 4.8 *Liaison with other professionals*

	Type of contact	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Health visitors	No contact	5	17	48	60	57
	Support	30	83	23	23	31
	Other contact	66	0	29	16	12
Social workers	No contact	24	24	58	72	68
	Support	33	76	23	15	20
	Other contact	43	0	19	13	11
Education officers and advisors	No contact	5	2	77	89	
	Support	22	20	10	6	Na
	Other contact	73	78	13	4	
Community education workers	No contact	60	33	84	81	90
	Support	25	23	10	9	6
	Other contact	15	40	7	10	4
Pre-school community organiser	No contact	46	2	29	40	43
	Support	31	30	42	26	32
	Other contact	22	67	29	35	25
N=		67	46	31	159	185

Table 4.9 *Entry Conditions*

Priorities	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Age of child	67	20	42	67	1
Child in pre-school year	21	0	7	3	0
Child toilet trained	22	2	20	56	0
Child speaks English	0	0	0	0	3
Child without medical problems	0	2	0	0	0
Other	2	2	3	43	7
None	14	78	55	13	90
N=	67	46	31	156	183

Table 4.10 *Waiting lists*

Waiting list in relation to current roll	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups* %
No waiting list at all	76	96	77	72
Waiting for full-time place				
Less than half current roll	12	13	19	
Half to full roll	9	11	10	
Full to double roll	0	11	17	
Double roll or more	0	26	10	
Waiting for part-time place				
Less than half current roll	22	13	23	
Half to full roll	22	24	19	
Full to double roll	18	15	3	
Double roll or more	9	11	7	
N=	65	45	31	159

* Detailed information is not available for playgroups or childminders.
72% of playgroups and 6% of childminders reported that they had a waiting list.
39% of childminders took children placed by the local authority, which would operate any waiting list.

Table 4.11 *Additional provision used*

At least one child also attending the following:	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Childminders	35	31	36	50	n/a
Playgroups	22	24	45	33	41
Mother and toddler groups	12	13	13	26	36
Nursery schools/classes	11	18	26	24	23
Day nurseries	7	11	10	17	5
Workplace nurseries	0	0	0	4	0
Other	15	4	3	8	11
None used by any family (as far as provider was aware)	46	36	29	25	30
N=	65	45	31	159	1

Table 4.12 *Providers caring for one or more children having certain first languages*

First Language	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Urdu	9	11	3	2	0
Punjabi	13	17	0	2	0
Mandarin/Chinese	12	2	0	2	0
Indian (not specific)	0	2	7	3	0
Japanese	0	0	3	1	0
Other Asian	5	2	3	2	0
Other European	8	7	7	4	1
Other	9	2	0	3	0
Any non-English language	39	36	14	11	1
N=	66	45	29	157	186

Table 4.13 *Comparative disadvantages for children*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Provision only part-time	12	4	0	0	1
Provision is outwith community	3	2	0	1	1
Premises are unsuitable	5	7	3	2	2
Lack resources	3	2	3	11	10
Poor race class sex mix	2	2	7	1	0
Day too long for some children	0	11	0	0	2
Other	11	7	3	5	17
No disadvantages	74	67	87	80	77
N=	66	45	31	152	171

Table 4.14 *Physical difficulties*

Providers caring for one or more children	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Who are hearing impaired	18	17	13	1	1
Who are visually impaired	9	15	3	1	1
With cerebral palsy	9	13	7	1	0
With spina bifida	6	7	0	0	1
With physical deformity/amputation	13	7	0	1	0
With multiple physical disability	2	50	0	0	1
With other physical disabilities	33	35	10	6	1
N=	64	46	30	159	186

Table 4.15 *Support for children with physical difficulties (% of those providing for children with physical difficulties)*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
No support required	11	0	0	0	33
Support within existing resources	17	4	0	27	33
Extra staffing/resources	22	9	13	18	0
Support from physiotherapist	44	74	13	0	17
Other contact with physiotherapist	22	35	0	8	83
Support from any professional from outwith the centre	56	78	50	27	33
Other support	14	9	0	0	0
N=	36	23	8	12	6

Table 4.16 *Learning difficulties*

Providers caring for one or more children	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
With language problems	32	15	0	0	1
With speech problems	24	22	7	8	3
With Downs syndrome	9	13	3	2	0
With general delayed development	21	33	0	2	1
With multiple learning problems	5	2	0	0	0
With other learning difficulties	14	15	7	0	0
N=	66	46	30	158	186

Table 4.17 *Support for children with learning difficulties (% of those providing for children with learning difficulties)*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
No support required	5	0	0	10	0
Support within existing resources	20	19	0	14	57
Extra staffing/resources	16	6	20	0	0
Support from any professional from outwith the centre	74	72	80	43	29
Parental support	2	3	0	14	0
Other support	12	9	0	0	0
N=	43	32	5	21	7

Table 4.18 *Emotional and behavioural difficulties*

Providers caring for one or more	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Hyperactive children	24	28	17	9	3
Withdrawn children	12	19	0	3	2
Autistic children	11	7	7	1	0
Children with aggressive behaviour	5	26	0	2	0
Children with general emotional problems	3	20	3	2	1
Children with other emotional problems	12	20	0	2	1
N=	65	43	30	158	186

Table 4.19 *Support for children with emotional or behavioural difficulties (% of those providing for children with emotional or behavioural difficulties)*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
No support required	3	3	0	0	0
Support within existing resources	21	25	29	100	63
Extra staffing/resources	10	3	14	0	9
Support from any professional from outwith the centre	66	64	43	29	9
Parental support	10	6	0	0	9
Other support	3	11	0	0	9
N=	29	36	7	28	11

Table 4.20 *Liaison with speech therapy and psychological services*

	Type of contact	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Speech therapy	No contact	3	17	81	92	93
	Support	25	33	0	6	6
	Other contact	72	50	20	3	2
Psychological services	No contact	8	7	74	98	96
	Support	18	17	10	1	2
	Other contact	75	76	16	1	2
N=		67	46	31	159	185

Table 4.21 *Sessional charges**

	Playgroups %
up to 9 pence	0
10-39 pence	2
40-79 pence	19
80 pence-£1.59	71
£1.60-£3.19	7
£3.20 or more	2
No charge	0
N=	159

* sessions normally last for one and a half to three hours

Table 4.22 *Hourly Charges*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Childminders %
up to 9 pence	9	9	3	1
10-39 pence	0	20	7	0
40-79 pence	1	0	13	5
80 pence-£1.59	0	0	45	69
£1.60-£3.19	0	0	26	24
£3.20 or more	0	0	7	0
No charge	91	70	0	1
N=	66	46	31	173

Table 4.23 *Daily opening hours*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Less than school hours	30	7	16	98	19
School hours (6.5 hrs per day)	42	4	13	2	4
More than school hours	28	89	71	0	78
N=	67	46	31	158	186

Table 4.24 *Opening days per week*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
less than 5 days	2	9	3	68	21
5 days	99	91	94	31	73
more than 5 days	0	0	3	1	3
N=	67	46	31	158	186

Table 4.25 *Yearly opening periods*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Under 40 weeks	3	0	7	18	3
School year: 40 wks	93	7	29	69	17
41-51 weeks	5	13	36	9	0
All year	0	80	29	2	80
N=	67	46	31	158	186

Table 4.26 *Keeping parents informed*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %
Produce a regular newsletter	73	64	23	40
Hold regular meetings	73	74	13	54
Telephone parents	27	33	26	6
Post up notices on boards	99	96	90	87
Advertise in local press	16	22	10	17
Home visit	21	41	3	3
Talk with parents at drop off/pick up time	100	94	97	88
Produce written reports for parents	63	54	16	2
Produce a handbook for parents	96	87	48	45
Other	9	17	7	12
Number of responding centres	67	46	31	159

Table 4.27 *Childminders' communication with parents*

Subject	%
General conversation	23
Child's behaviour/ health/happiness	82
Activities that child has been doing	64
Progress of the child	45
Discipline of the child	10
Other discussions	12
N=	177

Table 4.28 *Facilities for parents*

Parents have:	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %
Parents room/kitchen	47	24	23	38
Access to telephone/photocopier	0	10	0	0
Information board for parents' use	2	93	0	1
Parents groups or classes	3	15	0	1
Other	13	24	5	6
N=	60	41	22	150

Table 4.29 *Parental representation*

	Nursery Schools %	Day Nurseries %	Private Nurseries %	Playgroups %
Parent Teacher Association	35	8	0	Not asked
School board or equivalent	27	5	3	Not asked
Parents on management committee	10	36	13	72
Parents on Pre-5 forum	11	15	3	9
Other	8	39	0	11
N=	63	39	31	150

Table 4.30 *Comparative disadvantages for parents*

	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private provision %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Provision only part-time	26	7	3	7	1
Provision is outwith community	2	5	3	1	0
Provision is too costly	0	2	27	11	4
Premises are unsuitable for parent activities	9	5	3	1	0
Premises are unsuitable generally	2	0	3	0	0
Other	0	9	7	17	17
No disadvantages	55	77	73	75	78
N=	65	46	30	152	171

Table 4.31 *Aims of high quality services in relation to any type of pre-five provision (as set out by the European Commission Childcare Network)*

To ensure that children have the opportunity to experience: (% rating as 'very important')	Nursery schools %	Day nurseries %	Private nurseries %	Playgroups %	Childminders %
Happiness	88	100	97	92	94
A safe and healthy life	91	96	83	91	93
A stable learning and caring environment	91	96	93	82	83
Self-confidence and interest in learning	94	96	97	80	75
Equal opportunities irrespective of gender, race and disability	83	96	70	68	64
Esteem as an individual, liked as a person	88	96	70	61	62
Dignity, respect, autonomy, independence	91	98	77	54	56
Sociability, friendship, and co-operation with others	85	74	70	73	62
Support as part of a family and community	77	83	59	59	57
Spontaneous and/or creative expression	60	65	53	48	38
Cultural diversity	49	66	43	33	27
N=	65	46	30	158	181

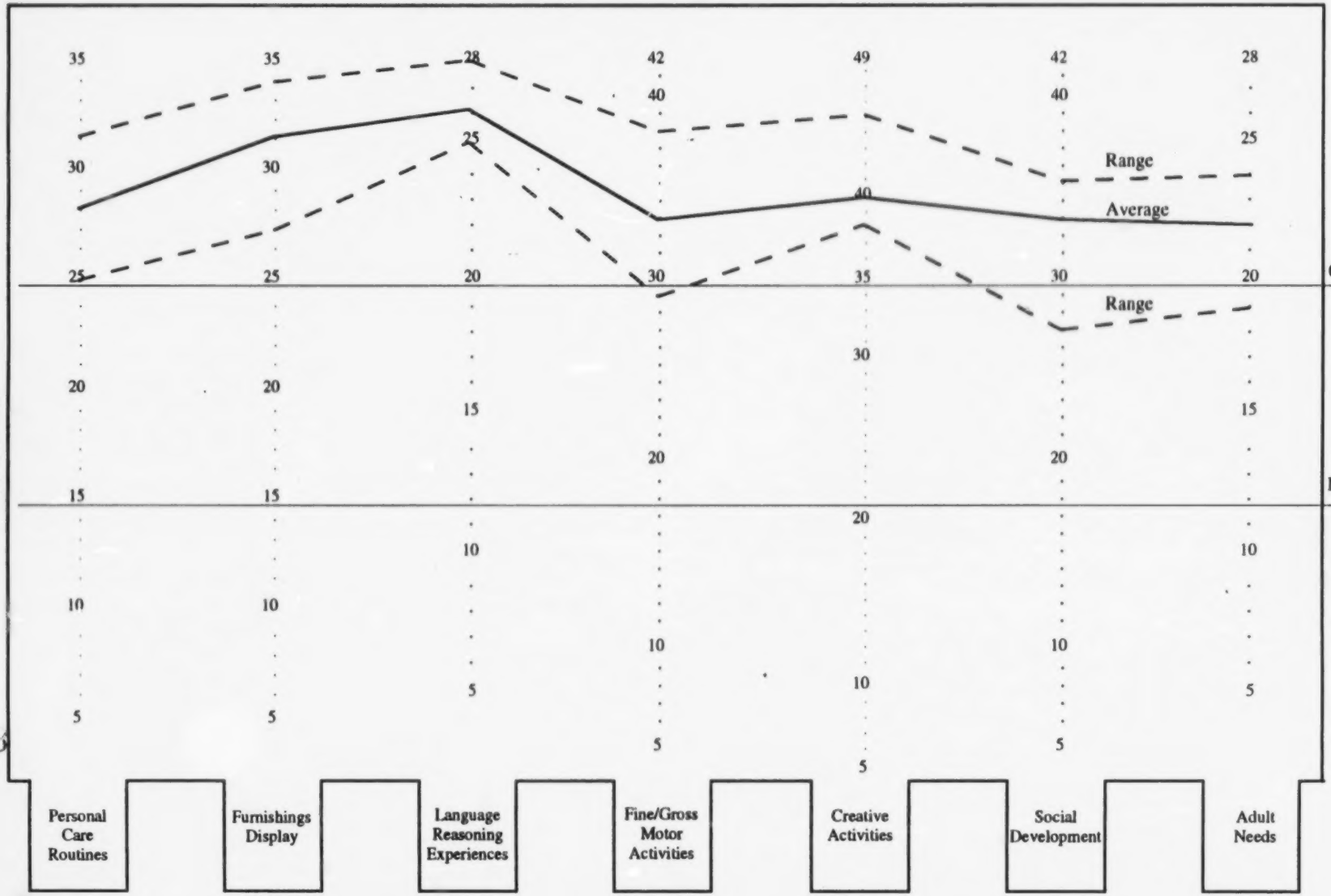
Table 4.32 *Childminders' qualifications in childcare*

	%
Playleaders Course	9
NNEB/SNNEB	8
Teaching qualification	5
Open University or related course	11
Other course or certificate	24
N=	186

Table 4.33 *Childminders' qualifications(excluding childcare)*

Certificate or qualification	%
School leaving certificate	5
'O' grades	46
'H' grades	16
CSE	4
GSE	7
Further Education Certificate	16
Higher Education qualification	7
Other certificate or qualification	17
N=	186

Graph A – Average Score and Range for Nursery Schools



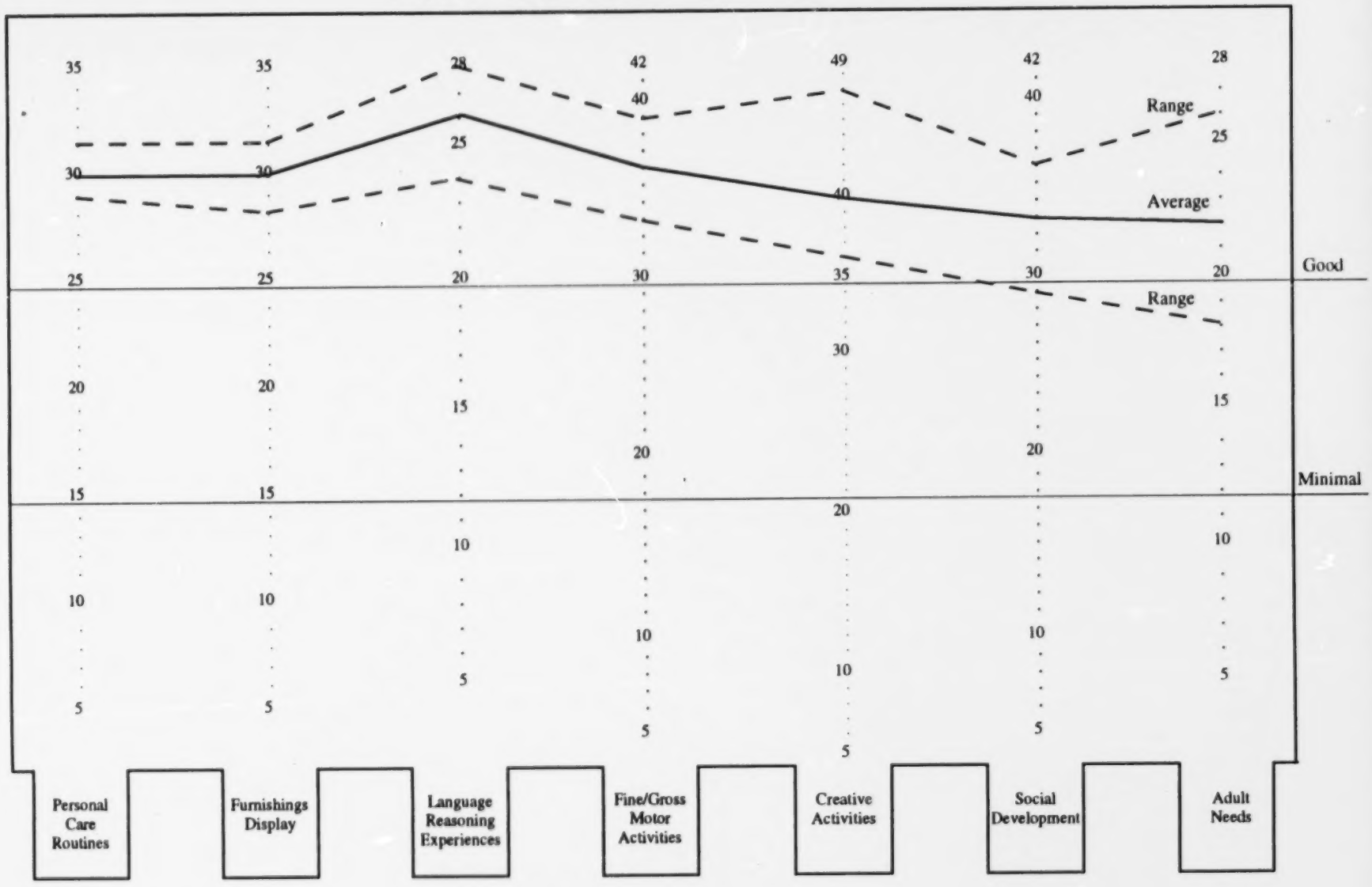
N=4

Appendix 5-i

Appendix 5

Appendix 5-ii

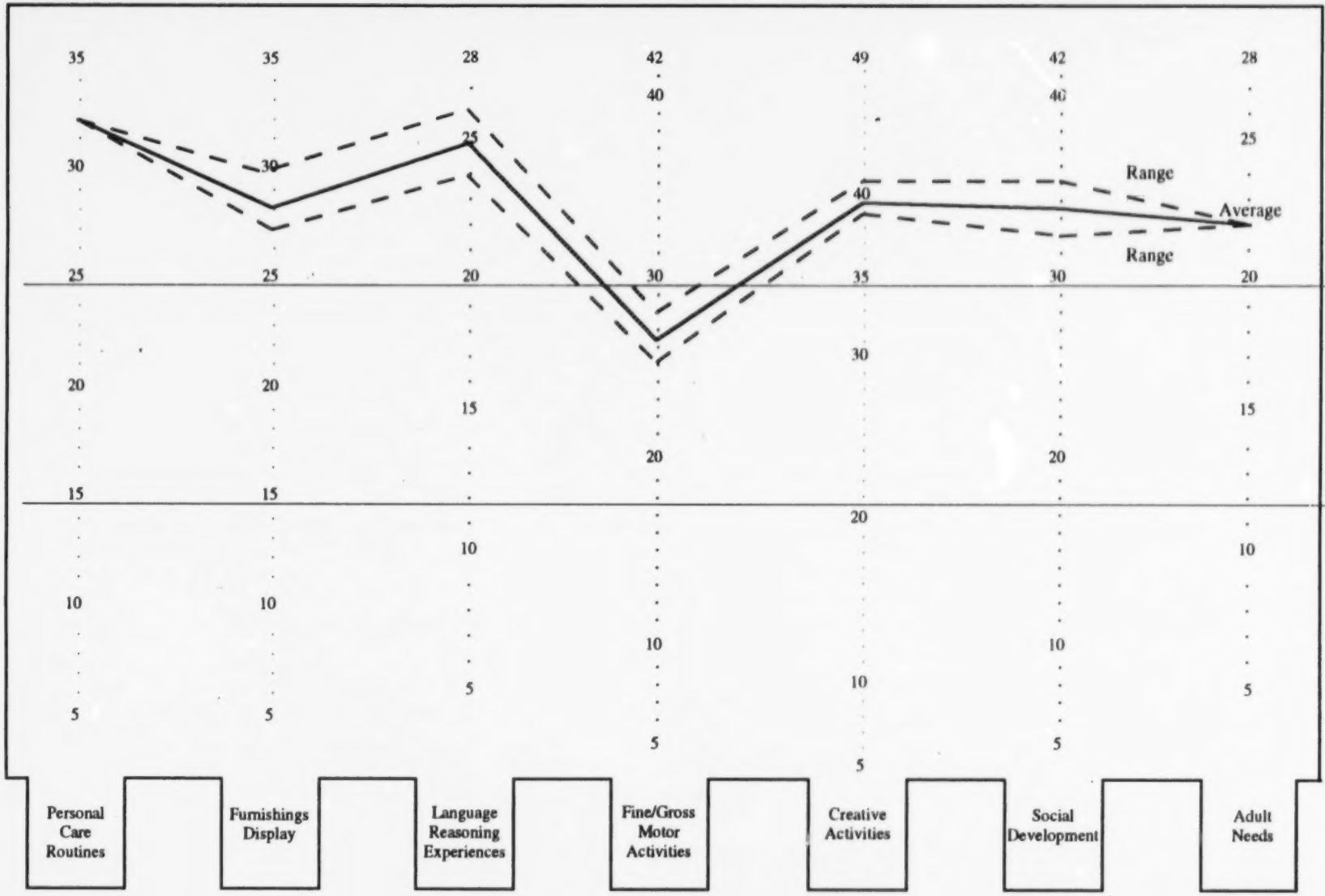
Graph B – Average Score and Range for Day Nurseries



N=3

235

Graph D – Average Score and Range for Partnership Nurseries



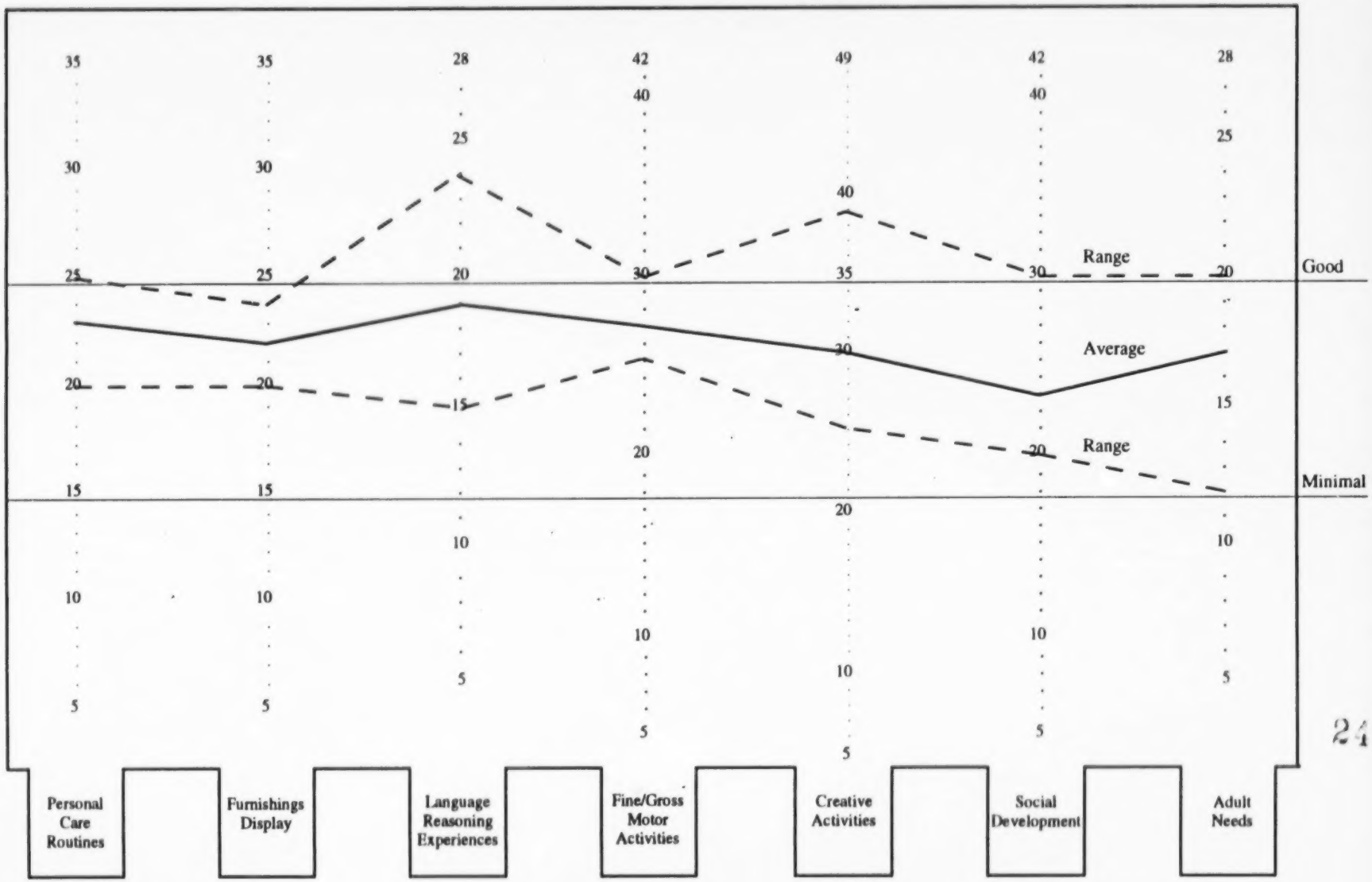
N=2 239

240

Appendix 5-iv

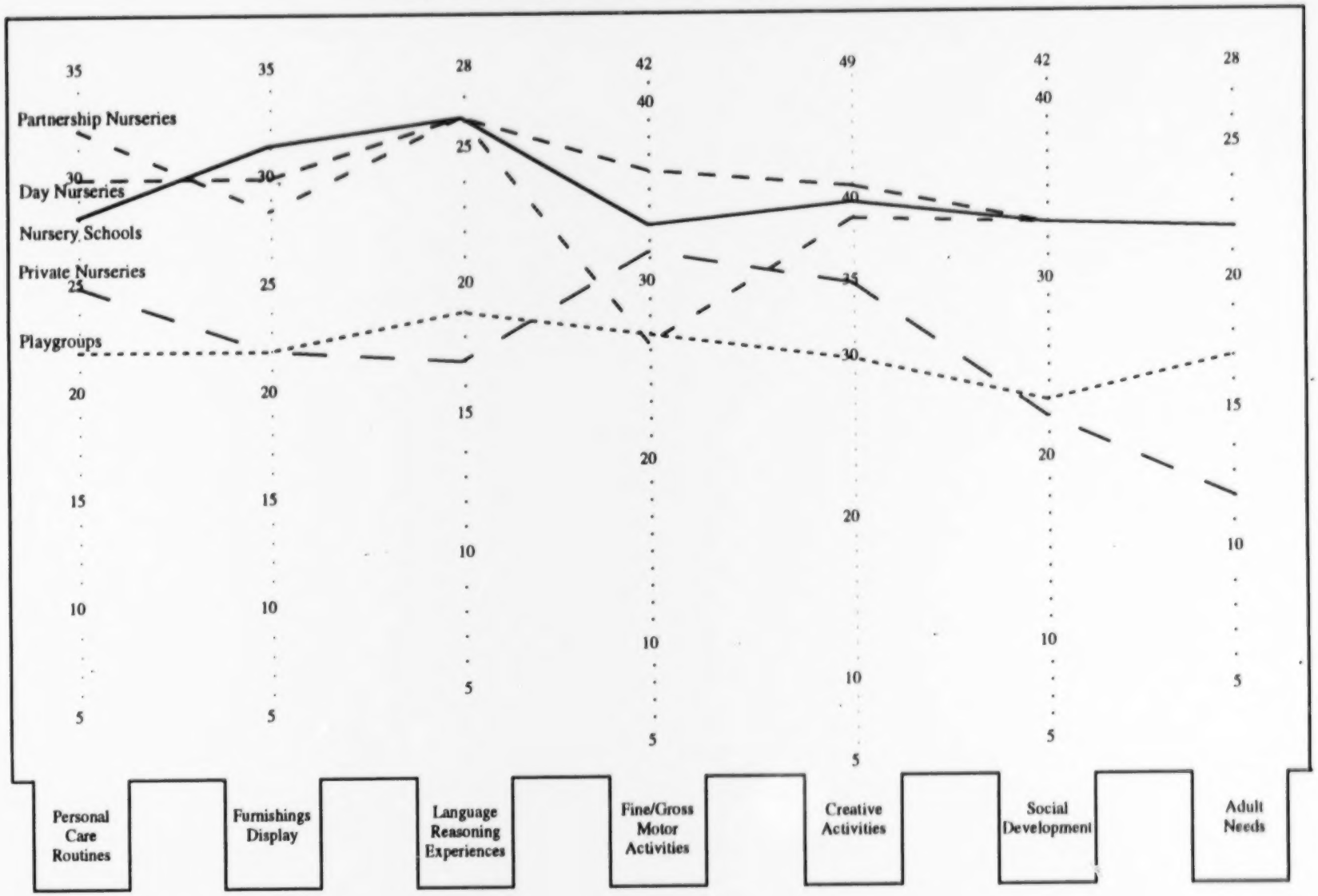
Appendix 5-v

Graph E – Average Score and Range for Playgroups



N=5

Graph F – Average scores for the Five Types of Provision



N=16

Appendix 7.1

Overview of the data from observations of 96 children in sixteen study centres

The following is based on the observations of the 'target' children group. Observations were carried out in respect of 576 two-minute time segments. As many categories of content and process as were observed could be recorded but in practice a maximum of two coded content areas and four process areas were observed during any one segment.

Type of observation	Number	%
Content		
Total time segments	576	100
Time segments with non-coded content area observations	221	38
Time segments with 1 or 2 coded content area observations	355	62
Time segments with 2 coded content area observations	36	6
Total coded content area observations	391	100
Most popular content area	Paints, crayons and felt-tips: 69	18
Process		
Total time segments	576	
Time segments with non-coded process area observations	69	12
Time segments with 1 or more coded process area observation	507	88
Time segments with 2 or more coded process area observations	277	48
Time segments with 3 or more coded process area observations	107	19
Time segments with 4 coded process area observations	15	3
Total coded process area observations	906	
Most popular process area	Observing: 272	30
Social Context I: Group size		
Number of coded time segments	563	98
Most frequently encountered group size	3 - 5 children: 223	40
Social Context II: Number of adults present		
Number of coded time segments	561	97
Most frequently encountered number of adults present	No adult present: 262	47
Involvement		
Number of coded time segments	530	92
Most frequently encountered involvement level	Intense moments; degree of perseverance: 179	34

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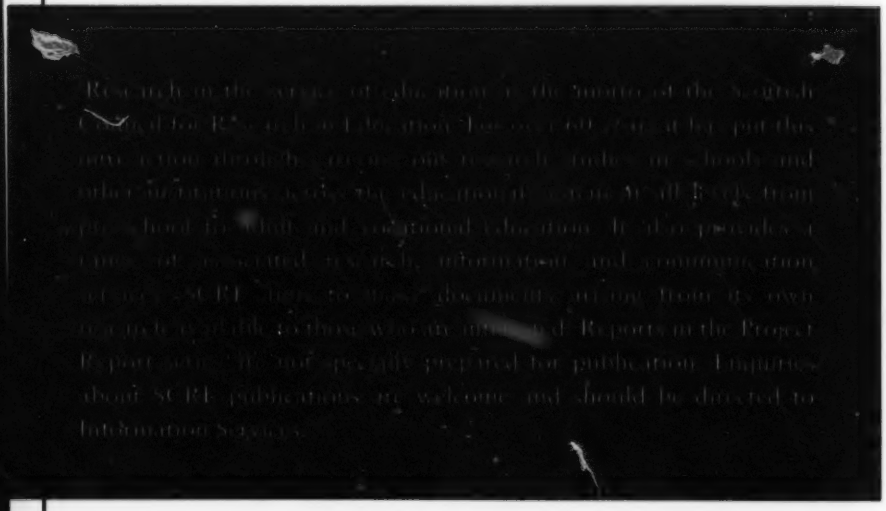

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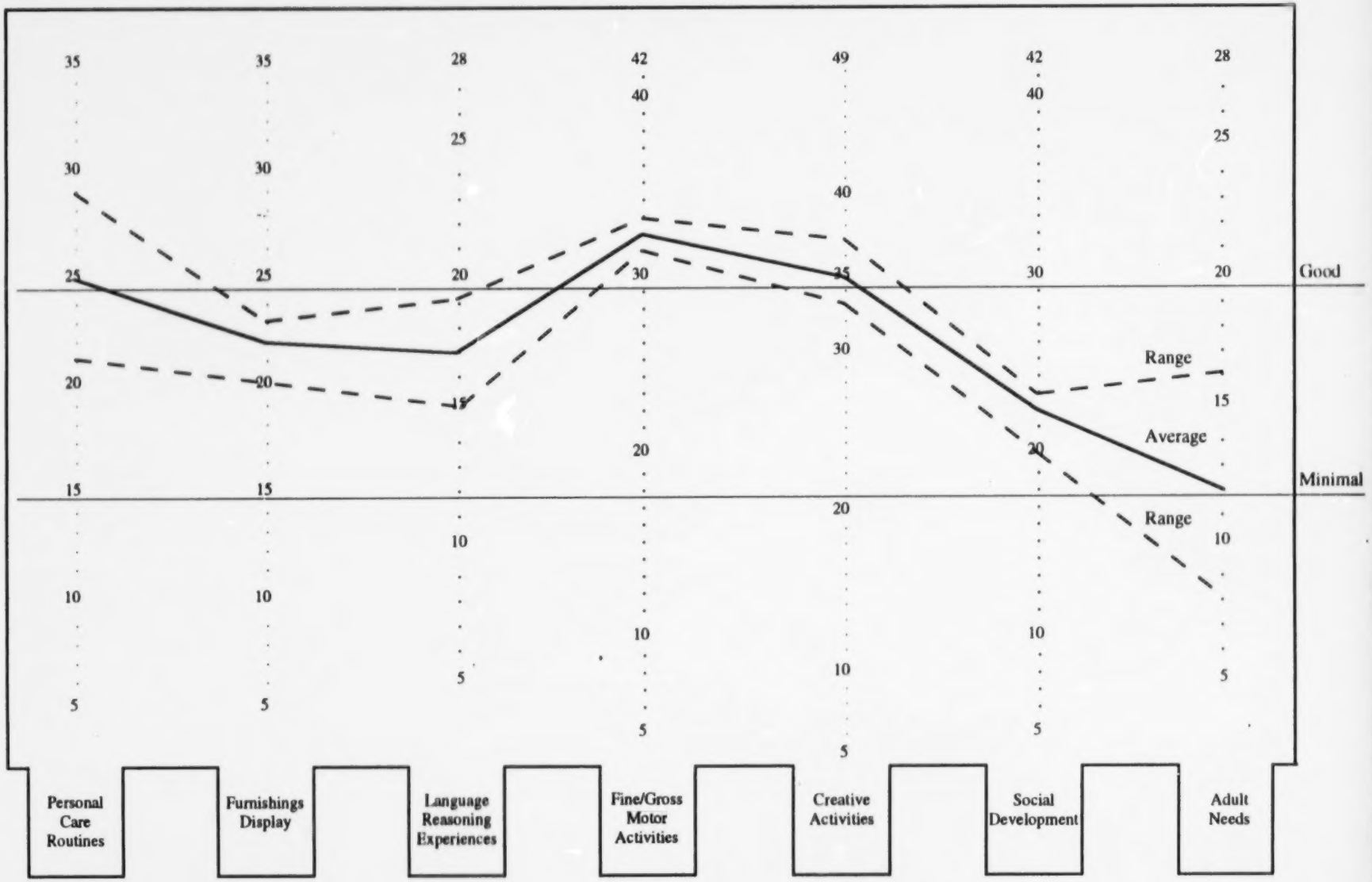
Graph C – Average Score and Range for Private Nurseries



Appendix 5-iii

N=2 237

238